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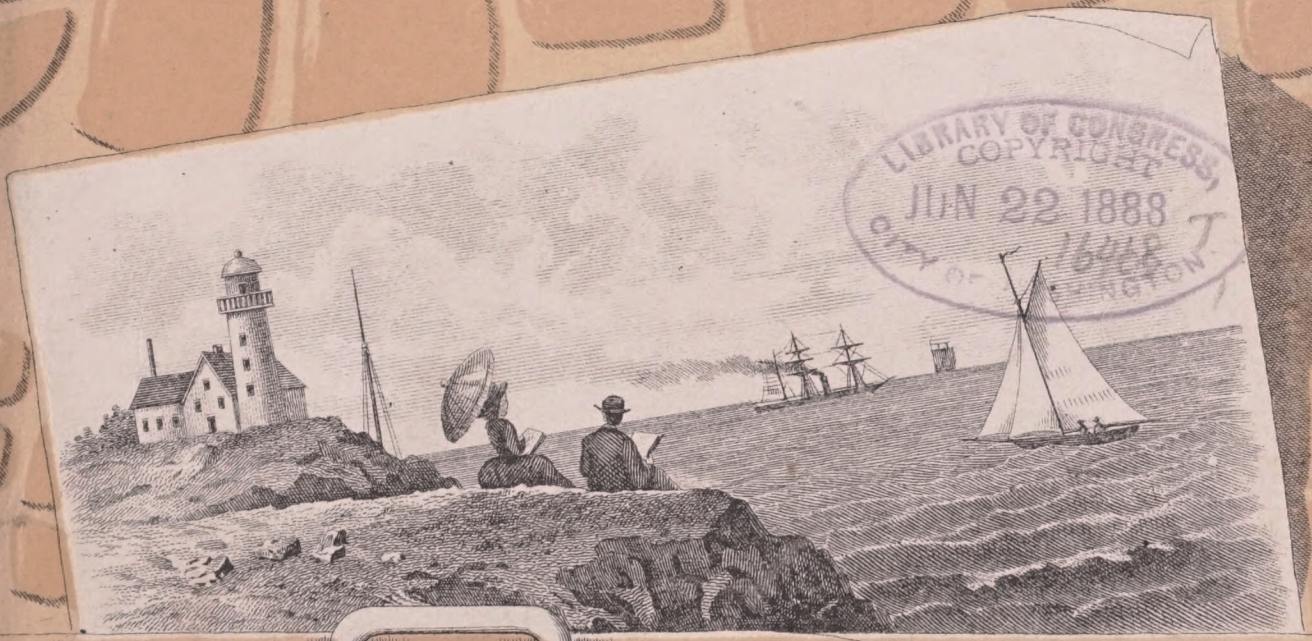
The Cossacks

By Count Lyof Tolstoi.



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THE COSSACKS.

BY

COUNT LYOF TOLSTOI.

TRANSLATED BY MRS. LAURA E. KENDALL.

NEW YORK:
GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET.

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THE COSSACKS.

CHAPTER I.

QUIET reigned in the streets of Moscow. The creaking of wheels upon the snow was heard only at rare intervals. No lights shone from the windows; even the street-lamps had been extinguished. The sound of church-bells was beginning to vibrate over the sleeping city, announcing the approach of dawn. The thoroughfares were deserted, though here and there one perceived a coachman sleepily waiting for a belated passenger, or an old woman making her way to some church, where the candles cast a flickering light over the gilded images. The working classes were gradually waking from slumber to resume their toil after the repose of a long winter's night.

For youthful idlers and pleasure-seekers it was still evening, however.

Though forbidden by law, a gleam of light was yet shining through the closed shutters of a window in the Chevalier Restaurant. A carriage, some sleighs, and a three-horse post-sledge were standing in front of the door. The porter, wrapped in his sheep-skin coat, was sheltering himself behind a corner of the house.

"Do they intend to stay here talking nonsense all night?" wondered a pale and tired waiter in the anteroom. "It is always my luck to be on duty at such times."

The voices of three young men at supper in the adjoining room were distinctly audible. The table was still strewn with the remains of the feast. One of the occu-

pants of the room, a small, thin, insignificant-looking young man, was gazing affectionately at a youth who was about to depart. The second, a tall young man, was lying on a sofa near a table covered with empty bottles. The third, who was dressed in a short pelisse, was walking up and down the room, pausing from time to time to take some almonds and crush them in his large, strong, but carefully kept hands. This young man, whose name was Olenine, was smiling gayly, his eyes sparkled, and his cheeks were flushed. He was talking feverishly with excited gestures, but it was very evident that he had some difficulty in finding words to express the feelings that filled his heart.

"I may surely be allowed to speak freely, now," he remarked. "I am not trying to justify myself, but I should like you to see the matter as I see it, and not as people in general view it. You think that I have not acted altogether right toward her, I believe," he added, turning to the plain-looking little man who was gazing at him so kindly but sleepily.

"Yes, I think you have done wrong," was the reply, though the speaker's countenance expressed even more affection than weariness.

"I know your opinion. You think that for a man to be loved is quite enough. That it is even better than to love."

"Yes, my dear friend, it is more than enough, I think."

"But why should not the love be mutual?" asked the other after a moment's reflection, in which he gazed at his friend with something like pity. "Why can not one love at will? It is certainly a great misfortune to know that one is beloved, and yet feel wretched because one can not return the love one has inspired; nor is one's remorse lessened by the knowledge that one has not done wrong intentionally. You seem inclined to think that I won the affection of a certain lady under false pretenses. Do not deny it. Nevertheless, whether you believe me or not, I assure

you that of all the follies I have committed—and their name has been legion—this is the only one for which I have no reason to feel any remorse. I have never willfully deceived either her or my own conscience. I really believed for a time that I loved her, afterward I found that I was mistaken, that my feeling for her was not love. My affection for her had cooled while hers had increased. Am I, then, to blame because I could not love her? What was I to do?"

"It is useless to discuss that question now, as all is over between you," said his friend, lighting a cigar to keep himself awake. "I will tell you one thing, though: that is, you have never loved yet, and you do not even know what it is to love."

"Never loved! that is true. I have never loved; but I long to know love—to find out if such a thing really exists as I understand it. My doubts on the subject are not yet satisfied. But what is the use of talking about it? I have spoiled my life, and all is over. You are right. I am going away to begin a new existence."

"That you will spoil afresh," remarked the young man reclining on the sofa.

His friend did not seem to hear him.

"I am sorry and at the same time glad to go, though why I should be sorry I hardly know," mused the youth who was about to depart.

Then he went on talking about himself without perceiving that the subject had not much interest for his companions. A man is never so egotistical as when under the influence of strong mental excitement. It seems to him then that no subject can be as interesting as himself.

"The driver will not consent to wait any longer," said a young servant clad in a sheep-skin coat and heavy woolen muffler, who entered just at that moment. "His horses have been waiting ever since midnight, and it is now four o'clock."

Olenine glanced at Vania, and fancied he saw in his traveling costume—his heavy fur-lined boots and his stupid face—a summons to a new existence—a life of privation, toil, and ceaseless activity.

"It is indeed time," he replied. "Farewell, my friends."

He buttoned his pelisse. His friends urged him to send some drink-money to the driver of the post-sledge and ask him to wait still longer, but he refused, and putting on his fur cap he paused in the middle of the room. His friends took leave of him, embracing him two or three times. He walked to the table, poured out a glass of wine, drained it, then taking the hand of his insignificant-looking friend, and blushing deeply, he said:

"Tell me—I can, I must speak frankly to you; my friendship surely warrants it—tell me—did you love her? I always suspected it— Yes?"

"Yes," replied the small young man, smiling gently.

"Then perhaps—"

"I have orders to put out the lights, sir," said the waiter, who could not understand why these young men were saying the same thing over and over again. "To whom shall I give the bill—to you, sir?" he added, turning to the tall young man, for he knew in advance to whom he was to deliver it.

"Yes. How much is to pay?"

"Twenty-six roubles."

The tall young man reflected a moment, but made no reply, and put the bill in his pocket. The others were still talking.

"Once more farewell. You are truly a brave fellow," said the little man, with a sad smile.

The eyes of both young men were moist. They all walked down-stairs. The traveler turned to the tall young man and said, blushing a little:

"By the way, will you have the goodness to settle my account with Chevalier and send it to me?"

"Yes, yes," replied the other, drawing on his gloves; then in an entirely different tone he added: "How I envy you!"

"Come on, then," said Olenine, moving along in the sledge so as to make room for his friend, who evinced no desire to accept the invitation, however.

"Well, I must be off," said the traveler, wrapping himself in a huge cloak. His voice trembled, however.

"Farewell, Mitia," said his tall friend. "God grant you—"

He paused. He was chiefly anxious for his friend to get away as soon as possible, so he did not finish the sentence.

There was a moment's silence; then some one again cried:

"Farewell!" and the driver whipped up his horses.

"Elizar, my carriage," cried one of those who remained.

The coachmen jerked their reins, and the wheels creaked noisily upon the snow.

"What a good fellow Olenine is!" said one of the young men; "but what a strange idea to go to the Caucasus, and to go in such a capacity. I wouldn't do it for anything. Will you dine at the club to-morrow?"

"Certainly."

And the young men separated.

The traveler felt uncomfortably warm, so seating himself in the bottom of the sledge, he unbuttoned his fur coat. The three horses bore him swiftly from street to street, passing houses he had never seen, in the darkness. Olenine said to himself that only those who were departing forever would pass through such streets. Everything around him was gloomy, silent, and lugubrious; and his soul was filled with tender recollections, emotions and regrets.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT kind hearts they have! how I love them!" he repeated again and again, and his tears were ready to flow. But why? And whom did he love so devotedly? He would have found it difficult to say. He glanced mechanically at a house he was passing, and wondered that it was so badly constructed; then he asked himself why Vania and the driver, who were utter strangers to him, should be so near him and obliged to accompany him; then he repeated again: "How kind they were! how I love them!" Once he even said to himself: "It is truly wonderful!" then recollecting himself he wondered if he were not drunk. He had really taken two bottles of wine; but his state of mind was not due to the wine alone. He was thinking of the affectionate words that had been said to him at the moment of departure—of the warm pressure of his hand, of the affectionate looks, and of the tone in which that "Farewell, Mitia!" had been uttered. He recollected, too, his own confession, and the deep interest in him which relatives and even casual acquaintances had manifested at the time of his departure, and how cordially they had seemed to forgive all offenses as on the eve of one's first communion or of death.

"It may be that I shall never return," he thought; and it seemed to him that his heart too was filled with a profound affection and regret for some one.

It was not his affection for his comrades, however, that had so softened his heart as to extort these incoherent words from him, nor a love for any woman, for he had never loved; no, it was a love of self, or rather of all that he considered best and noblest in himself, that made him weep and murmur these rambling words.

Olenine had never completed any college course, nor had he ever filled any official position, though registered for awhile in one of the government departments. He had spent the greater part of his fortune; and though he was now twenty-four years of age, he had not yet decided upon any career or turned his attention to any business. He was merely what is known in Moscow as a young society man. At eighteen he had enjoyed all the freedom that was allowed in Russia twenty years ago to youthful members of wealthy families who were left orphans at an early age. He was subjected to no mental or moral restraint whatever, but was allowed to think and act precisely as he pleased. He was no philosopher, nor was he a bore or easily bored; on the contrary, he was an easy victim to influences of every kind. He had decided that love was an empty word; nevertheless he trembled at the sight of a young and handsome woman.

He pretended to despise rank and position, yet he experienced no little satisfaction when Prince Serge approached him during a ball, and addressed a few friendly words to him. Still he did not yield to such influences to such an extent as to become a slave; on the contrary, whenever he perceived a difficulty he lost no time in overcoming the obstacle and recovering his liberty, and was ever asking himself how he could best utilize the forces of his youthful manhood—not the power of intellect, heart, or of moral training, but the irresistible enthusiasm which youth alone can impart to a man, and which makes him master of the universe in his own estimation. There are men who are ignorant of this irresistible power—men who accustom themselves to the curb from their entrance into life to their death, and toil on honestly and placidly until death; but Olenine was profoundly conscious of the possession of this potent auxiliary which concentrates all our faculties upon a single desire—to will and to act—and makes one throw one's self head first into an abyss without even knowing

why. He rejoiced and gloried in this conscious power, these strivings after the unknown. Up to this time he had loved only self; he believed himself capable of the noblest deeds, and had not yet had time to become undeceived. Though aware of his faults, he persuaded himself that they were merely the result of circumstances; that his intentions had always been good, and that he was about to begin a new life in which he would have no cause for repentance, and surely find happiness.

When one starts upon a long journey one retains for several hours a vivid recollection of the place one has just left; then one wakes with new impressions. One thinks only of one's destination, and begins to build castles in the air anew. This was Olenine's experience. After leaving the city he cast his eyes over the snow-clad fields and rejoiced at the thought of being alone in this wilderness, then he wrapped himself more closely in his pelisse and soon fell asleep.

It was daylight when he reached the third station. Here he assisted Vania in transferring his portmanteau and trunks to another sledge, where he enthroned himself in the midst of his possessions, content to know that everything was safe and in its proper place. This feeling of satisfaction and the thought of the long journey before him made his heart feather-light.

He spent most of the day in calculating the distance he must travel before reaching the next station—the next city, the place where he was to stop for dinner, for tea in the evening, and the distance he had already traveled. He went over his debts, too, and calculated how many of them he could pay, and how much money he would have left afterward, and what part of his income he could spend each month. After he had taken tea that evening he said to himself that he would still have seven elevenths of the distance to travel after leaving Stavropol, that he would have to economize closely for seven months to pay all his

debts, and that they would swallow up about one eighth of his fortune. After that he laid down in the bottom of the sledge and was soon sound asleep.

The voice of Vania and the sudden pausing of the sledge aroused him. Half asleep, he tumbled into another sledge and continued his journey.

The following day there were more stations and more tea, the same panting of swiftly moving horses and short conversations with Vania; the same vague dreams and the profound slumber of youth during the night.

CHAPTER III.

On reaching the Cossack territory on the Don, Olenine exchanged his sledge for a carriage, and after passing Stavropol the air became so mild that he laid aside his pelisse. It was springtime in this region—an unexpected springtime that delighted the young man. He no longer traveled at night, nor was he allowed to leave the stations after dark—that would be dangerous. Vania was evidently uneasy, and kept his gun loaded. Olenine felt more and more pleased. At one of the places where he stopped to change horses there was a great deal of talk about a frightful murder that had been committed a short time before. The men they met on the road were all armed.

"This is the beginning of a new life," Olenine said to himself; and he waited impatiently for a glimpse of the snow-topped mountains of which he had heard so much. One evening the driver pointed with his whip to a mountain-chain dimly visible above the clouds. Olenine strained his eyes to obtain a better view of them, but they were almost hidden by the clouds. He saw something vague and gray and wavy, but not at all beautiful, and he said to himself rather petulently that mountains and clouds differed but little in appearance, and that their pretended beauty was

all a humbug, like the music of Bach and love, and he ceased to think of them.

An unusual coolness in the air roused him the next morning at dawn, and he glanced carelessly around him. The morning was beautiful and serene, and he suddenly perceived, apparently only about twenty miles from him, enormous masses of dazzling whiteness outlined against the distant sky. When he realized how far these imposing heights were from him he felt their incomparable beauty, and seized with a secret terror, he almost believed himself the victim of a dream. Indeed, he shook himself roughly to satisfy himself that he was really awake. Yes, the mountains were really and truly there before him.

"What is that? What do I see?" he exclaimed.

"The mountains," replied the driver in an indifferent tone.

"I have been admiring them a long time," said Vania. "How beautiful they are!"

The chain appeared to flee toward the horizon before the rapid approach of the *troika*, and the snow-clad peaks assumed a lovely roseate hue beneath the rays of the rising sun. Profoundly impressed with their beauty, Olenine's recollections of the past, his misdemeanors, his repentance, and his mad illusions, all faded away in the majestic presence of these lofty peaks.

"It is only now that you are really beginning to live," a mysterious voice whispered in his ear. The winding Terek, now visible in the distance, the *stanitsas* and the Cossacks he met, all assumed an almost sacred aspect in his eyes. He looked at the sky, but could think only of the mountains; he looked at Vania, and could think only of the mountains—always of the mountains.

Two Cossacks passed on horseback with guns on their shoulders; the blue smoke from two cottages was curling up in the air beyond the Terek; the rising sun crimsoned the tall reeds that bordered the river; several young and

handsome women suddenly appeared on the side of the road, and in the distance some Abreks could be distinctly seen riding swiftly over the plain.* But Olenine did not fear them. He was young, strong, well-armed, and he was dreaming of the mountains—always of the mountains.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT portion of the valley of the Terek inhabited by the Grebenskoy Cossacks is about eighty verstes in extent, and of the same general character. The Terek is a rapid and turbid river; but here it becomes more calm, and its bed is considerably wider. The right bank of the stream is low and sandy; the left rugged and precipitous, and shaded with venerable oaks and plane-trees. On the right bank are the villages of the more friendly though still rather dissatisfied tribes, and on the left, about half a mile from the river, and about five or six miles apart, are the post stations. In former years these stations were on the very bank of the stream, but the river, which moved further and further northward with each succeeding year, has undermined them, and there now remain only a few overgrown gardens, in which fruit-trees are closely woven together by a thick network of brambles and wild vines. No one lives there now; the sandy soil bears the tracks of only the deer, wolves, and hares that have taken up their abode there.

A road has been cut straight through the forest from station to station. Along this road are outposts garrisoned by Cossacks. A narrow strip of fertile and densely wooded land constitutes the domain of the Cossacks. North of this begin the sandy plains of the Nogai, which are finally lost in the Turkoman, Astrakhan, and Khirgiz steppes. South of the river are the Great Tchetchnia and Black

* Circassians on hostile terms with Russia.

Mountains, and beyond them, in the far off horizon, a snowy chain which no one has yet ventured to explore. This belt of fertile and well-wooded land has been peopled from time immemorial by a handsome and warlike race known as the Grebenskoy Cossacks, or Cossacks of the mountain-tops.

Centuries ago their ancestors left Russia and settled among the Tchetchna Mountains. Here they intermarried with the Circassians, and gradually adopted their habits and customs, though they preserved their mother tongue and their religious faith unsullied. Tradition claims that Ivan the Terrible once visited this region and gave them the land upon this side of the river on condition that they would remain on friendly terms with Russia, promising them, in return, entire liberty of action and conscience. The Cossacks even now consider themselves closely related to the Circassians; and a love of liberty, of war and of rapine are their chief characteristics. The power of Russia is felt only in tampering with their elections, stationing troops in their midst, and forbidding the use of bells in their churches.

The Cossack in his secret heart hates the bandit who has killed his brother much less savagely than he hates the soldier who has been sent to protect his village. He respects his enemy, the mountaineer, and despises the soldier, whom he considers an intruder. The Russian peasant is a savage and despicable creature in the eyes of the Cossack. To him true elegance in dress consists in a close imitation of the Circassians. The weapons he prizes most are procured from them; his best horses are bought or stolen from them; still this little Christian tribe, located in an isolated corner of the globe, and surrounded by half-savage Mussulmen, has a most exalted idea of its own importance, and heartily despises all the rest of mankind.

The Cossack spends most of his time at the outposts or in hunting and fishing excursions. He very rarely works at home; when he is there he usually spends his time in

drinking. The Cossacks manufacture their own wine, and drunkenness is not considered a vice, but a custom that must be strictly observed.

The Cossack regards woman as the source of his prosperity. A young girl may be idle and enjoy herself, but a married woman must work as long as she lives, and be as submissive and obedient as the women of the Orient. Under this severe *régime* the Cossack woman, though apparently an inferior, really has even more influence and authority in the household than the women of the Occident. Though the Cossack may consider it beneath his dignity to talk familiarly with his wife in the presence of strangers, he recognizes her supremacy when alone with her, and realizes that she supports the household by her exertions. Though he considers work humiliating, and leaves it to his hireling or his female slave, he vaguely realizes that he owes his comfort and prosperity to his wife, and that she has the power to deprive him of it.

The Cossack woman, in spite of her onerous burden of toil and anxiety, or possibly by reason of it, acquires remarkable physical strength and a vast amount of good sense and decision of character. She is stronger, more clever, and much handsomer than the men. Her beauty is a striking union of the purest Circassian type of face with the more powerful physique of our northern women. She wears the Circassian costume—a Tartar shirt, embroidered jacket, and full drawers, but she also wears a handkerchief tied around her head in the Russian style. Women, and especially young girls, are allowed the greatest freedom in their relations with men, and an elegance of attire and the most exquisite neatness in their home life are necessities of existence with them.

Novomlinska is considered the most important station in the territory of the Grebna Cossacks. Here the manners and customs of the ancient Cossacks are carefully pre-

served; and the women of this station have always been remarkable for their beauty.

The Cossack's principal means of livelihood are his vineyards, orchards, fields of watermelons, millet and maize, his hunting and fishing expeditions and the booty gained in war.

Novomlinska is separated from the Terek by a dense forest about three miles wide. On one side of the road leading to the station is the river, on the other orchards and vineyards, and beyond them the Nogai steppes. In front of the station is a tall stone *porte-cochère* covered with a thatched roof. Near it, mounted on a wooden carriage, is an antiquated cannon upon which the rust of a century has gathered. Sometimes a Cossack armed with saber and gun is on guard at the gate, and sometimes not; sometimes he salutes a passing officer, and sometimes he does not.

A strip of board affixed to the gate gives us this information:

"Houses, 266. Population—males, 897; females, 1,013."

The houses are all built upon piles four or five feet above the ground. The roofs are high and carefully covered with reeds. All are neat and in excellent repair. They are not crowded together, but picturesquely grouped on either side of the wide street. The majority have large windows, shaded by luxuriant vines and trees of all kinds. The public square in the center of the village is adorned by three shops, well stocked with calicoes, sunflower seed, gingerbread, and other dainties.

The house of the colonel is surrounded by a high wall. It is larger than the others, and boasts of double windows.

There are very few persons visible in the street in the summer time. The young Cossacks are at the outposts or in the country. The old men are hunting or fishing, or assisting their wives in their gardens or vineyards. Only the sick or the very young remain at home.

CHAPTER V.

It was one of those evenings that are seen only in the Caucasus. The sun had disappeared behind the mountains; but it was still light. The air was clear, calm, and sonorous, and the snow-clad mountains stood out in bold relief against the rich crimson of the western sky. The river, the road, and the steppes, all wore a lonely and deserted air. If a horseman occasionally appeared in sight returning from the outpost, those who saw him anxiously asked themselves if he was not an enemy. All the inhabitants of the village were slowly making their way homeward. The women, who had been tying up vines all day, now turned their steps villageward; the gardens were fast becoming deserted. Young girls with long switches in their hands ran merrily out to meet the cattle that were coming leisurely toward the station enveloped in a thick cloud of dust. Gay laughter and merry sallies mingled with the lowing of the kine. A Cossack on horseback taps at a cottage window without alighting. The beautiful face of a young woman appears, and a few tender words are uttered in a low tone.

A Tartar laborer, who has just brought a load of rushes from the steppes, drives his cart into his employer's courtyard and begins a loud-voiced conversation with his master in his native tongue.

In the middle of the street is a large pool, which one can avoid only by keeping close to the fences on either side. A bare-footed Cossack girl, with a bundle of fagots on her back, wades through it with skirts uplifted. A Cossack horseman, who is just returning, laughingly cries out to her: "Raise them higher, you wench!" and levels his gun at her. She drops her skirts, throws down her burden,

and runs away. An old Cossack, returning from fishing, with his fish still gasping on a string, crawls through a gap in a neighbor's hedge, scratching himself sadly. An old woman passes, dragging a dry branch after her; the sound of wood-chopping is heard on every side. Children shout noisily as they toss their balls; the smoke is pouring from every chimney; in every cottage preparations for the evening repast are going on.

Oulita, the wife of the cornet, and likewise the schoolmaster, is standing in the door-way of her cottage, like the other women, waiting for the cattle, which her daughter Marianka is driving home. She had not had time to open the gate when an enormous buffalo-cow, driven nearly frantic by a crowd of gnats, plunges against the gate, breaking it down. She is followed by several cows, whose large eyes turn tranquilly toward their mistress.

The lovely Marianka follows them, replaces the gate, throws away her switch, and runs with all the swiftness of her light feet to drive the cattle to their proper places.

"Take off your shoes, you devil's imp! You are ruining them!" cries her mother.

Without taking the slightest offense at this insulting epithet, which she seems to regard as a term of endearment, Marianka goes cheerfully on with her work. Upon her head is a handkerchief which partially conceals her face, and she is clad in a scant pink slip and a blue jacket. She disappears from sight in the barn-yard, but you can hear her trying to coax the buffalo-cow into good humor. "Come, come, stand still now, my dear," she says, tenderly.

Soon the girl and her mother return to the house with the evening's milking, and Marianka replenishes the fire, while her mother goes back to her place in the door-way. It is nearly dark now. The air is filled with the smell of vegetables, cattle and smoke. The lowing of cattle in the

court-yard is mingled with the voices of women and children. A masculine voice is rarely heard on a week-day.

A tall and robust woman crosses the street to ask Mother Oulita for a brand to light her fire.

"Have you finished your work already?" she asks.

"Yes. You want a light, do you? Come in and help yourself."

The visitor seats herself with the air of one who feels inclined to chat awhile.

"So your husband is still in school?" she asks.

"Yes, he writes that he will not be home until the holidays."

"He's a sensible man, your husband is! As for my Lukashka, he's at the outpost, and they won't let him come home for some time."

The school-teacher's wife was perfectly well aware of this fact, but the new-comer wished to speak of her son who had just entered the service, and whom she wished to marry to Marianka.

"I sent him some shirts the other day by Tomoushkin, and he tells me my son is a great favorite with the officers. He tells me, too, that they are on the track of some Abreks again, and that Lukas seems to be both contented and happy. He is a good boy, and if I could see him well married I could die happy."

"I don't see why you should have any difficulty about that. There are plenty of girls here at the station."

"Yes, but your Marianka is the girl for me."

Oulita is perfectly well aware of her visitor's wishes, but being an officer's wife, and quite well off, while Lukas is poor and has no father, she is not particularly anxious for the match. In the second place, she is in no hurry to part with her daughter, and thirdly, propriety demands that she should maintain an air of profound indifference.

"Yes, I think she will be as good as any of them when

she gets a little older," she responds, in a rather reserved manner.

"After we finish gardening I am coming with some of my friends to pay my respects to Ilea Vassilitch, and make a formal demand for your daughter's hand."

"And why to him, I should like to know," replied the cornet's wife, haughtily. "It is to me you must apply, but all in good time."

The visitor saw that it would not be advisable to say any more just then, so she rose to go. As she stepped out of doors she met Marianka, who bowed politely as she passed.

"As handsome as a queen, and a good worker," thought the old woman. "It is quite time for her to get married, and marry my Lukashka she must and shall."

Oulita sat in the door-way deeply absorbed in thought, until her daughter's voice aroused her from her reverie.

CHAPTER VI.

THE young Cossack Lukashka, of whom the two old women had been talking, was standing guard that very afternoon on the watch-tower at Nijni Protolsk, on the banks of the Terek. An attack from some Abreks was hourly expected, that tribe usually choosing the month of May for their invasions, the water then being so low that the river could be forded without much difficulty, and the forest more easily passable than later in the season. The Cossacks had received a communication from the colonel a short time before, bidding them be on the alert, as spies had informed him that a party was preparing to cross the Terek. There were no signs of any unusual watchfulness at the post, however. The Cossacks were making themselves as comfortable as possible; the horses were not saddled, and the men had laid aside their weapons, and were devoting their attention to hunting, fishing and drinking. Only the Cossack on guard was armed, and his saddled

horse was grazing on the edge of the wood. The officer of the day, a tall, angular man, with remarkably small hands, was sitting on the terrace in front of the guard-house, with his head resting on his hands, and an expression of intense ennui depicted on his countenance.

An old Cossack with a long, gray beard, and no clothing, save a shirt confined at the waist by a leather belt, was lying stretched out upon the river-bank, lazily watching the turbulent waters. Several others, who had stripped off nearly all their garments on account of the heat, were washing their linen in the stream, or lying on the warm sand singing in subdued tones. Another Cossack, with a pale, thin face, was lying dead drunk near the guard-house, which had shaded him for a couple of hours from the sun that was now shining full in his face.

Lukashka was a tall, handsome fellow, about twenty years of age, and his form, though angular, like that of most very young men, indicated great physical strength and endurance. Though he had seen but little military service, the expression of his face and the calmness of his demeanor showed that he was fully sensible of his dignity as a Cossack and a soldier. His caftan was rather ragged, and his cap worn on the nape of his neck, after the Circassian fashion; but his shabby attire was worn in the dashing style of the Circassian bravo. A true Circassian must have the finest of weapons; but it does not matter in the least how shabby and ragged his uniform is, or how carelessly it is thrown on. Lukashka's features were by no means regular, but he attracted one's attention at the first glance by his powerful frame, his intelligent air, and his heavy black eyebrows, and one involuntarily exclaimed: "What a handsome fellow!"

"The streets are full of women, nothing but women," he said, half scornfully, and with a supercilious smile that disclosed teeth of dazzling whiteness, as he gazed with blinking eyes through the glare toward the village.

Nazarka, a Cossack who was lying on the ground below, hastily raised his head.

"They are going for water probably," he remarked.

"How they would run if I fired a shot at them! What a panic there would be!"

"Your gun can't send a bullet as far as that."

"Yes, it can, and further too," retorted Lukashka, angrily brushing away the gnats that were tormenting him.

Just then a slight noise in the underbrush attracted the Cossack's attention. A spotted dog was running toward the post, wagging its tail violently. Lukashka recognized it as the property of one of his neighbors, and the old sportsman himself appeared in sight a moment afterward.

Uncle Jerochka was an aged Cossack of powerful stature, and a heavy beard of snowy whiteness. His shoulders and his broad breast were so admirably proportioned that he did not impress one as being unusually large, however. He was clad in a ragged caftan; on his feet he wore deer-skin sandals, and on his head was a ragged fur cap. Strapped across one shoulder was his *kabilka,* and on the other a wild-cat he had just killed, and hanging from his belt a bag containing his ammunition and some bread, a horse-tail to drive away the gnats, a huge dagger in a torn and blood-stained sheath, and two dead pheasants.

"Here, Lion!" he cried to his dog, in a stentorian voice, that resounded through the forest. "Good-day, my friends," he continued, in the same loud tone, as if wishing to make himself heard by some one on the other side of the river.

"Good-day, good-day, uncle," answered the young Cossacks, merrily.

"Well, what's the news to-day?" asked Uncle Jerochka, wiping his sunburned face on the sleeve of his caftan.

"There's a strange sort of falcon hiding in that plane-tree, uncle. Last night it flew round and round the tree

for hours," said Nazarka, with a sly wink at his companions.

"That's only one of your yarns," retorted the old hunter, suspiciously.

"You just watch and see," answered Nazarka, laughing.

The other Cossacks burst into a loud guffaw, for Nazarka had seen no falcon, and the young men had fallen into the habit of teasing Uncle Jerochka whenever he came to the post.

"You can't talk anything but nonsense," remarked Lukashka from his perch, and his friend below instantly became quiet.

"Well, I'll wait here and see," said Uncle Jerochka, to the great delight of the other Cossacks. "Have you seen any wild boars about here?"

"We are on the look-out for Abreks, not wild boars," said the corporal, delighted to have an opportunity for a little conversation. "Have you seen anything of any?"

"No. Have you any brandy? I wish you would give me a little if you have, for I am very tired. Give me a drink," he added, addressing the corporal, "and I'll bring you a piece of boar's meat soon; indeed I will."

"Are you going to stay here awhile?" inquired the corporal, ignoring the old hunter's request.

"I intend to spend the night here, and I may be lucky enough to kill some game. If I do you shall have your share, as truely as God lives."

"Go back up the river and you'll find a fine drove of them, Uncle Jerochka," cried Lukashka. "One of our men shot one only the other day. I swear it," he added, in a serious and convincing voice.

"So that is you," said the old man, looking up. "Where did he shoot the boar?"

"Am I so small that you couldn't see me before?" retorted Lukashka. "The boar was near the ditch; my gun

was in its sling, so Hioushka shot it. I'll show you the place. It is not far off. Uncle Moses,'' he continued, addressing the corporal in a rather commanding tone, "it is time to change guard,'' and without waiting for orders he picked up his gun and began to descend from his perch.

"Come down,'' said the corporal, glancing around him. "It's your turn now; isn't it, Gourko?''

CHAPTER VII.

The sun had set, and the shades of night were rapidly settling down upon the forest. The Cossacks had concluded their duties, and were assembling for supper. The old sportsman, however, still remained under the plane-tree, watching for the falcon. Lukashka was making a pheasant-trap, singing one song after another as he worked. It was evident that he was a clever mechanic, in spite of his tall stature and big hands.

"It's supper-time, Lukashka,'' cried the shrill voice of Nazarka from the wood close by.

As he spoke he made a plunge through the brambles and alighted in the road with a live pheasant under his arm.

"Where did you get that?'' asked Lukashka. "It is mine, probably.''

"Perhaps it is; I don't know.''

"You found it in the ditch near the old plane-tree. I set a trap there yesterday. Wring its neck and pick it and we'll make a dish of *pilaf*.''

"Shall we eat it or give it to the corporal?''

"He has enough without it.''

"I can't bear to kill a pheasant.''

"Hand it here, then.''

And Lukashka drew a small knife and cut the pheasant's throat so quickly that the bird did not have time to stretch its wings before its bleeding head was severed from its body.

"There," said Lukashka, throwing the bird on the grass.

Nazarka shuddered.

"Do you know that devil," referring to the corporal, not the bird, "is going to send us on another reconnoitering expedition," he remarked. "It is Thomushka's turn to go, but he has sent him after brandy, and we've got to do his work for him. Think how many nights we've been out already. Let's tell him flatly that we won't go. Tell him we're tired out. He'll listen to you."

"What difference does it make?" replied Lukashka. "If we were at the station it would be very different; one can have some fun there, but when one's at the outpost it matters very little whether one's on duty or not."

"When are you going to the station?"

"At festival time."

"They say your Dounaika is flirting with Thomushka," remarked Nazarka, suddenly changing the subject.

"Let her; I can easily find another 'another.' "

"Gourko says he went to the house, and found her husband away. Thomushka was sitting at the table with a cake in front of him. Gourko stayed awhile and then went away. As he left he stopped a minute under the window, and heard her say: 'That imp has gone now; why don't you eat your cake, my darling? You mustn't think of going home to-night. Stay here with me.' And Gourko called out: 'Bravo! bravo!' from under the window."

"You are lying."

"No, I'm not. It's the truth; I swear it!"

Lukashka was silent for a moment, then he said, sullenly:

"I don't care; let her have the fool if she wants him. There are plenty of other girls, and I was beginning to get tired of her any way."

"What a cool fellow you are. You ought to make up to Marianka, the cornet's daughter."

Lukashka frowned darkly.

"And why Marianka? She's no better than any of the rest," he retorted, as he started toward the post, switching the leaves from the branches as he passed. At last he paused in front of a smooth, straight sapling, drew out his knife and cut it.

"It will make a capital ramrod," he remarked, as he cut the air with it.

The Cossacks were sitting cross-legged on the ground around a low table.

"Whose turn is it to go out to-night?" one of them called out to the corporal, who was in the next room.

"Whose turn is it? Let me see," was the reply. "Bourlak has been out, and so has Thomushka," he added, in a rather uncertain voice. "Lukashka and Nazarka had better go, I guess, and Ergouchou, too, if he has got over his drunk."

"I think you must have taken a drop too much, too," remarked Nazarka, in a low tone.

The Cossacks began to laugh.

Ergouchou was the drunken Cossack who was sleeping outside the hut. In a few moments he woke and came in, rubbing his eyes.

Lukashka rose and began to examine his gun.

"Finish your supper and start as soon as you can," cried the corporal, closing the door without waiting for any sign of assent from his subordinates. "If I hadn't received special orders I wouldn't send any one out to-night."

"Of course we will have to go," stammered Ergouchou. "The service demands it."

They were preparing to start when Uncle Jerochka, tired of his fruitless vigil under the plane-tree, entered the hut.

"I'll go with you, my boys," he said, in a deep base voice that drowned all the others. "You can hunt Abreks, and I'll hunt wild boars."

CHAPTER VIII.

It was dark when old Jerochka and the three Cossacks, wrapped in their *bourkas,* and with their guns on their shoulders, started down the bank of the Terek. Nazarka had at first refused to accompany them, but Lukashka took him to task so savagely that he dared not persist in his refusal. After walking a short distance in silence they entered a path that was scarcely visible among the reeds. This path led straight to the river. On the bank lay a big black log, around which the reeds were trampled and broken.

"Is this the place?" asked Nazarka.

"Where else should it be?" retorted Lukashka. "Sit down; I'll be back in a minute. I want to show Uncle Jerochka where I saw the wild boars."

After proceeding a short distance up the stream he paused by a large pool.

"It is here that they come to drink, you see," he whispered, pointing to some freshly made tracks.

"May Christ save you!" responded the old hunter, gratefully. "They will come here again, so I'll wait for them."

Lukashka retraced his steps along the river bank, glancing now to the right, now to the left of him.

A sudden rustling among the reeds, followed by a splash in the water, made him start and seize his gun. A wild boar had jumped from the bank into the stream. Its dark form was visible for a moment on the surface of the gleaming water, then disappeared from sight among the rushes. Lukashka raised his gun, but the beast vanished before he had time to fire. With a gesture of annoyance he resumed his course. On approaching the ambuscade he whistled

softly. His signal was answered, and he advanced toward his comrades.

Nazarka was already sound asleep. Ergouchou was sitting with his legs crossed under him.

"This is a good place to watch, an excellent place," he remarked. "Did you show the old man the place?"

"Yes, and I saw a splendid boar just now in the river. Did you hear him?"

"Yes, I heard a noise, and concluded you had scared up a wild beast of some sort. I'm going to take a little nap now," he added, wrapping himself in his cloak. "Wake me up when the cocks crow. The regulations require it. Then you can sleep and I will watch."

The night was dark and still. But few stars were visible, the western sky being covered with a heavy black cloud, which was slowly rising higher and higher in the heavens. In front of Lukashka lay the Terek; behind and on both sides of him was a rampart of reeds. Occasionally these reeds would begin to wave to and fro without any apparent cause. Further on water, bank and cloud were lost in the thick darkness.

The rustling of the reeds, the heavy breathing of the sleeping Cossacks, the murmur of the stream and the buzzing of the insects, all the monotonous noises of the night, were broken from time to time by a distant shot, the fall of a bit of gravel, the splashing of a large fish or the movements of some wild animal in a neighboring thicket. An owl flew down the river, slowly flapping its wings. Directly above the heads of the Cossacks it turned toward the forest, where it fluttered around a long time amid the branches of an old plane-tree. At each new sound Lukashka pricked up his ears, and involuntarily placed his finger on the trigger of his gun.

The night was wearing away. The big black cloud was settling down lower in the west, and through its ragged edge the young moon shone softly down upon the mount-

ains. The air had become much cooler. Nazarka woke, talked awhile and then fell asleep again. Lukashka being too weary of this enforced inaction got up, drew out his knife and began to scrape the ramrod of his gun. He thought of the Abreks. What if they should attempt to cross the stream at some other point? He peered up and down the river, but saw only the opposite bank dimly visible in the light of the crescent moon. Then he ceased to think of the Abreks, and began to long for the moment to come for waking his companions and returning to the outpost.

The thought of Dounaika, his *douchinka*, or "little soul," as the Circassians style a sweetheart, recurred to his mind, greatly to his disgust, however. The near approach of dawn was now evident; a soft mist began to rise from the river, the young eagles began to call shrilly and to flap their wings. The crowing of a cock resounded in the distance; it was quickly answered, then others were heard.

"It is time to wake them," thought Lukashka, whose eyes were beginning to feel very heavy; and he had already turned to his companions when suddenly his attention was attracted by a faint splashing sound. He glanced toward the mountains and toward the opposite bank of the Terek. It seemed to him that the bank was moving and the stream motionless, but the illusion lasted only for an instant. He gazed intently at the water, and a large black log surmounted by a long branch specially attracted his notice, for without rolling over or tossing about, it moved straight toward the middle of the river. There it stopped beside one of the sand banks, and Lukashka fancied he saw a hand on the other side of it. "I shall kill an Abrek all by myself," he muttered, seizing his gun.

He set up his gun-rest, placed the weapon upon it, cocked it noiselessly, and then took aim. "I shall kill him," he thought. Nevertheless his heart throbbed so violently that he waited an instant. Just then the log made a sudden

plunge and again began to move slowly across the stream toward the Russian shore.

"What if I should miss him," he thought. Just then the moonlight revealed a man's face above the log. It seemed very near to Lukashka—just at the end of his gun. "It is an Abrek," he said to himself, joyfully, and throwing himself on his knee and mechanically obeying a habit formed in infancy, murmured: "In the name of the Father, Son—" and pulled the trigger. The flash that followed lighted up the stream for an instant, and Lukashka saw the log tossing and plunging madly to and fro as the current bore it swiftly down the stream.

"Stop! Hold on!" cried Ergouchou, springing up from behind the ambuscade and seizing his gun.

"Hold your tongue, you fool," muttered Lukashka through his set teeth. "The Abreks are upon us."

"What are you shooting at?" demanded Nazarka.

"Abreks, Abreks, I tell you."

"You are joking. Did your gun go off accidentally?"

"I have killed an Abrek, I tell you," cried Lukashka, springing to his feet. "He was swimming across the river, near the sand bank, and I shot him."

"You are joking," repeated Ergouchou, rubbing his eyes.

"Look and see for yourself," said Lukashka, seizing him roughly by the shoulders and glancing in the direction indicated.

Ergouchou saw the body, and his tone suddenly changed.

"There must be more of them," he whispered, shouldering his gun. "This one must have come on ahead to reconnoiter; the others are close behind him, you may be sure."

Lukashka unhooked his belt and pulled off his coat.

"What are you going to do?" cried Ergouchou. "You're exposing yourself to certain death. If you have killed him he can't get away. Give me a little powder.

You, Nazarka, had better run to the post, but not by the river bank. They'd be sure to kill you."

"Do you think I'm going back there alone. Thank you, you can go yourself," replied Nazarka, angrily.

Lukashka was all ready to leap into the river, but suddenly changed his mind.

"Run back to the post, both of you, as quick as you can!" he exclaimed. "I'll stay here. Tell the Cossacks to come at once. If the others have crossed we must catch them."

"Take care, Lukashka; don't move, or they'll kill you," cried Ergouchou, as he hastily made the sign of the cross and started for the post.

"Go along; I know what I'm about," responded Lukashka; and after examining his gun he again crouched down behind the log.

Left alone, he never once took his eyes from the sand bank. With every nerve strained to the uttermost, he watched breathlessly for some sign of the other Abreks' presence; but he was some distance from the outpost, and he was in a perfect fever of impatience. He was afraid, too, that the Abreks would escape him; he even feared that he would lose the man he had killed; he was afraid he would lose his prey as he had lost the wild boar the evening before. He gazed around him, ready to fire the instant an enemy appeared. The idea that he might be killed himself never once occurred to him.

CHAPTER IX.

Day was dawning, and the body of the dead Circassian was now distinctly visible. The sound of approaching footsteps resounded near Lukashka, who hastily raised his gun and cocked it, again murmuring: "In the name of the Father, and the Son—" But on hearing the click of the gun, the person who was approaching seemed to pause.

"Hold on there, Cossacks, don't shoot your uncle!" cried the calm, sonorous voice of Jerochka.

"Good heavens, man! I came within an ace of killing you!" exclaimed Lukashka.

"What were you firing at?" inquired the old man.

As his voice broke the mysterious silence that brooded over the scene, the daylight seemed to become brighter and clearer.

"You have had no luck, I see," said Lukashka; "but I —I've killed a wild beast."

But the old hunter's eyes were already riveted upon the human form lying motionless on the quicksand.

"He was swimming across the river with the branch of a tree tied on his back; I saw him, and—"

"Yes, I understand," replied the old hunter, petulantly. "You have killed an Abrek," he added, almost sadly.

"I was sitting here when I suddenly noticed something moving on the other side of the river," continued Lukashka. "It looked like a big log, but strange to say, instead of following the course of the current, it came straight across the river. In a moment a man's head appeared behind it. I got my gun ready and bided my time. The moon came out from behind the clouds just then, and I could see his back distinctly as he swam along. 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son,' I said, and fired. I could see him struggle. He uttered a groan, or rather I thought I heard one. 'God be praised; I've killed him!' I thought. He tried to lift himself out of the water, but his strength failed him. He struggled for awhile, then ceased to move. He must be dead. The Cossacks have run to the outpost. Heaven grant that the others do not escape us."

"You took him by surprise; he is dead now, unquestionably," and the old man shook his head sadly.

Loud shouts were now heard; the other Cossacks were coming, some afoot, some on horseback.

Lukashka, without waiting any longer, undressed himself, but without taking his eyes off his victim.

"Wait for Nazarka; he is coming with a boat," cried the corporal.

"Idiot! take your dagger; he may be alive," shouted another Cossack.

"Nonsense!" replied Lukashka, as making the sign of the cross he plunged into the stream only to reappear an instant after, and swim toward the quicksand, cleaving the dark waters of the Terek with his powerful white arms. When he reached the body he seized it and shook it vigorously. "He is really dead!" he cried, exultantly.

The bullet had pierced the brain of the Circassian. He was clad in blue trousers, and wore a shirt and caftan. His gun and dagger were strapped across his back, and over them was tied the large branch that had deceived Lukashka at first.

"This is the way we catch carp," remarked one of the Cossacks, who was standing by the body, which in the meantime had been pulled out of the water and laid on the grass.

"How yellow he is!" remarked another.

"Where are our fellows who started out in search of the other Abreks?" inquired another. "They must be on the other side of the river. This one must have been acting as a scout, or he would not have ventured across the river alone."

"He seems to have been the most enterprising of the party—a true *djighite*," said Lukashka, ironically. See how carefully his beard is dyed and trimmed."

"I say, Lukashka," interrupted the corporal, "you had better take his caftan and dagger, and let me have the gun. I'll give you three roubles for it. It is loaded," he added, examining the weapon, "and I should like to keep it as a memento."

Lukashka made no reply. He was annoyed at the

rapacity of his superior officer, but knew he would be obliged to accede to the request. He frowned darkly, however, as he threw the caftan on the ground.

"The devil might at least have worn a decent coat!" he growled. "This thing is nothing but a rag."

"It will answer for you to cut wood in," remarked one of his comrades.

"I'm going home now, Mosef," said Lukashka to the corporal.

"Very well; I've no objections. Carry the body down to the outpost, boys," said that officer, continuing his examination of the gun. "Put him in a cool, shady place. Perhaps some of his friends or relatives will come to ransom the body."

"It's not so very warm."

"No; but the jackals may get after him, so you had better make a little canopy of boughs over the body."

"We had better station a guard over him, for they will be sure to come for his body; and it wouldn't do to have it all torn to pieces."

"Well, do as you please, Lukashka; but I really think you ought to treat," said the corporal.

"Certainly, certainly," cried the entire party in chorus. "Think how lucky you have been to kill an Abrek the very first thing."

"Buy the coat and dagger, some of you," said Lukashka. "I'll sell the trousers, too; I can't get into them. The fellow was as thin as a match."

One of the Cossacks bought the coat for a rouble; another promised to give two gallons of wine for the dagger.

"Now you must drink to my health, my friends," said Lukashka. "I'll bring you a gallon of wine, too, from the station when I come back."

"How about the trousers? Are you going to give them to the girls to cut up into handkerchiefs?" queried Nazarka.

A hearty laugh greeted this sally.

"Stop your fooling," growled the corporal, "and bring the body along. Are you going to leave it here all day?"

"Yes; what are you waiting for?" cried Lukashka authoritatively. "Come here and pull the body further up on the bank."

They all obeyed as promptly as if Lukashka had been their superior in rank. As they did so Nazarka examined the face of the dead man and the wound in his temple.

"He has a scar on his forehead," he remarked. "That is a very lucky thing, for his relatives will have no difficulty in identifying him."

The sun had risen, and its rays were now shining brightly upon the thicket, the turbulent waters of the Terek, and the forest in which the pheasants were greeting the awakening of nature with their shrill cries. They shone too upon the livid face of the dead man, whose powerful and swarthy body had been stripped of all clothing save the trousers, which were confined about the waist by a leather belt. His sunburned brow contrasted vividly with the bluish whiteness of his closely shaven head. The glassy eyes were open, and seemed to be gazing at something in the dim distance; the thin lips wore a crafty smile; the joints of the rigid fingers were covered with hair, and the nails were dyed red.

Lukashka's toilet was still uncompleted. His neck was very red, and his eyes sparkled more than usual. He was shivering slightly, though a slight steam was rising from his young and robust body.

"What a strong, vigorous fellow he was!" murmured Lukashka, compelled strongly against his will to admire his fallen enemy.

"Yes; if he could have got hold of you you wouldn't have had much chance," replied one of his comrades.

The Cossacks again started toward the outpost. Half an hour later Lukashka and Nazarka were both striding swift-

ly through the forest that lies between the river and the station.

"Don't let her know that I sent you, but find out whether her husband is at home or not," said Lukashka.

"All right. Afterward I'll go to Yamka's. We might as well have a little fun to-night," replied the ever-obedient Nazarka.

"Yes, now or never," responded Lukashka.

On reaching the station the two Cossacks treated themselves to a quart of brandy, and then threw themselves down on the ground to sleep until night.

CHAPTER X.

THREE days after the incident we have just related, two companies of infantry suddenly appeared in the village of Norumlinsk. Their wagons were immediately unharnessed in the public square, and their cooks forthwith began their preparations for a hearty meal. In a few minutes the sergeants were getting their men together, stakes were being driven into the ground to tether the horses, and the quartermasters were running to and fro finding lodgings for the officers and soldiers. The companies had received orders to station themselves in this village, so the soldiers had only to make themselves at home, though why this particular village had been selected for their quarters no one seemed to know or care to know. The soldiers, tired and covered with dust, scattered through the village like a swarm of bees. Ignoring the Cossacks' evident dissatisfaction, they chatted gayly among themselves, entering the cottages and leaving their knapsacks and ammunition there and jesting familiarly with the women. Groups gathered around the soup kettles in the square, watching the fire crackle and roar, or following with their gaze the steam from the savory mixture intended for their refreshment. They laughed, too, and jested among themselves at the

customs and habits of the Cossacks, so unlike those of Russians; and on every side resounded shrill cries and vituperations from the Cossack women as they defended their property and refused their unwelcome guests water and household utensils. Children clung closely to their mothers, watching the intruders with mingled terror and curiosity.

Olenine, who had been acting as a color-bearer of this regiment for several months, had been quartered in one of the best houses in the station—that of Cornet Ilea Vassilitch, the husband of Mother Oulita.

"What is to become of us, Dimitri Andreitch?" cried Vania, breathlessly, addressing Olenine, as that young gentleman, mounted on a Kabarda mare, rode gayly into the cornet's court-yard after a five hours' march.

"Why?" he inquired, patting his horse's neck, and gazing with no little amusement at his exasperated servant.

Olenine's appearance had undergone a complete change. His once smooth cheeks were now covered with a thick beard; his complexion, formerly rendered sallow by late hours and dissipation, had become clear though sunburned. His closely fitting black coat had given place to a loose blouse, and he carried a rifle; but though dressed in Circassian style, he wore his new garments rather awkwardly. It was easy for one to detect the Russian at a glance; no one would have mistaken him for a *djighite*. Nevertheless he was evidently well pleased himself.

"You laugh," replied Vania, "but indeed, sir, I wish you would speak to these people. One can get nothing out of them; they won't even answer a civil question. One would suppose they didn't understand Russian."

"You should have applied to the commandant of the station for information."

"But I didn't know where to find him."

"What has annoyed you so much?"

"The master of the house is not at home. He has gone to some outlandish place or other, they say, and the old

woman is a perfect devil. How we are going to live here I can't imagine. They are worse than the Tartars, I tell you, though they call themselves Christians. He has gone to the *kriga*. What the devil is a *kriga?* Nobody knows. They must have invented the word themselves."

"Never mind, Ivan," said Olenine, good-naturedly. "I'll find the mistress of the house and arrange matters. We'll get on all right, never fear; only keep your temper."

Vania regarded Olenine only in the light of a master, and Olenine saw in Vania only a servant, and both would have been greatly astonished to learn that they were really intimate friends without suspecting it. When Vania was eleven years old he became a servant in the house of Olenine's father; Olenine was about the same age, and when he became about fifteen he amused himself by educating Vania, and taught him a little French, of which he was very proud. Even now, when he was in a good humor, he would always say a few French words, invariably accompanying them with a complacent laugh.

Olenine ran up the steps and pushed open the cottage door. Marianna, clad only in a loose pink slip, after the fashion of Cossack girls, sprung with a bound from the door to the wall, covering a part of her face with her full sleeve. In spite of the rather dim light, the tall, graceful form of the young Cossack girl was distinctly visible to the admiring eyes of the young man. Gazing upon the girl-like, but vigorous form, whose outlines were only veiled, not concealed, by the thin calico garment she wore, and at the superb black eyes that were surveying him with half frightened, half childish curiosity, the thought, "Here she is at last!" darted through his mind. Then he said to himself that he should probably see many other such girls. Mother Oulita, whom he now noticed for the first time, was on her knees, with her back to him, washing up the floor.

"Good-evening, mother," said he; "I have come to see about the lodgings."

The old woman turned her wrinkled but still handsome face toward him.

"What do you want? How dare you come here to bother me, plague take you!" she cried, gazing at him askance from beneath frowning brows.

Olenine had always flattered himself that his regiment would be cordially received by the Cossacks, so this decidedly rude treatment astonished him; but without losing countenance, he endeavored to explain to the old woman that he would pay a fair and even liberal rent.

"What ill wind blew you here?" she retorted. "You are not wanted; you may rest assured of that. I don't need your dirty money. Look at you now, poisoning my house with tobacco smoke, and offering to pay me for it. Fy on your money! May a thousand bombs rend your entrails!" she almost shrieked.

"Vania is right," thought Olenine; "no Tartar would be half as bad as this."

And he left the cottage, followed by the shrill imprecations of the old woman.

Just as he was leaving the house, Marianna, still in the same loose garment, but swathed up to the very eyes in a big white handkerchief, darted by him and down the steps. There she paused, and turning suddenly, cast a quick glance at the young man from out her laughing eyes, then disappeared around the corner of the house.

Her firm, buoyant tread, her sparkling eyes and her half curious, half frightened expression all made a deep impression on Olenine.

"It is she!" he said to himself, and thinking more about the beautiful Marianna than about his lodgings, he rejoined Vania.

CHAPTER XI.

THE master of the house returned that evening, and on learning that he would be well paid for the use of his rooms, he managed to calm his wife's wrath and indignation, and induce her to consent to the arrangement.

They finally agreed to relinquish this, their summer cottage, to Olenine for a rent of three rubles a month, and take up their abode in the cottage they usually occupied in winter. After his rooms were put in order Olenine seated himself by the window and looked out into the street. The heat was abating, and a profound silence reigned, for the soldiers were all installed in their new quarters, and the cattle and the laboring population had not yet returned. The house Olenine occupied was near the edge of the village, and the quiet and comfort of his new abode was most refreshing after three months of camp life. He reviewed the recent campaign, the dangers he had incurred, and the highly creditable manner in which he had conducted himself. All recollection of his former life in Moscow had grown dim; he had entered upon a new existence in which there was nothing to prevent him from regaining his own self-respect, and he experienced a feeling of inexplicable and irrational contentment. He glanced out at some little boys who were playing ball in the shade, and then about his new dwelling, and said to himself that he was sure to enjoy this new life amazingly.

He gazed too at the cloudless sky, and at the distant mountains with a profound appreciation of their beauty.

"Uncle Jerochka has licked the pitcher! He has swapped his dagger for brandy!" yelled the little Cossack boys, suddenly, as they perceived that worthy coming up

the little street with his gun on his shoulder and three pheasants dangling from his belt.

"I have sinned, my boys, I have sinned," he replied, waving his arms and glancing stealthily at the houses on both sides of the street. "Yes, I have swapped my dagger for brandy," he continued, with pretended indifference, though he was really much annoyed by the jibes of the children.

Olenine was astonished at the lads' impertinence, but he was even more astonished at the old hunter's expressive face and athletic form.

"I say, Cossack, come here a moment!" he cried.

The old man paused and turned toward the window.

"Good-day, my worthy sir," he said, uncovering his closely clipped head.

"Good-day; what are those boys about?"

Uncle Jerochka approached the window.

"They are teasing me, but I like it. I don't mind their having a little fun out of their old uncle," he said, with the slight drawl common to very old persons. "Are you in command of this company?"

"No, I am only the standard-bearer. Where did you kill those pheasants?"

"In the forest. Won't you have a pair?" handing two birds through the window. "Are you much of a hunter?"

"I'm very fond of it. I killed four pheasants during the campaign."

"Four! that's a fine lot," said the old man, laughing.

"Are you fond of drink too?"

"Of course; I like it very much at the proper time."

"Ah! I see you're a young man after my own heart! We shall be friends, I am sure," was the response.

"Then come in and we'll take a glass together."

A moment later the ruddy countenance of Uncle Jerochka appeared in the door-way of the cottage, and not until then did Olenine realize the gigantic size and muscular

strength of this venerable man, whose long beard was of snowy whiteness, and whose bronzed face was lined with deep furrows, imprinted there by old age and hard toil. But in spite of his advanced years he had the broad shoulders and firm muscles of a much younger man. His head was covered with scars; his neck was thick and covered with thick folds of flesh like that of a bull, and his callous hands were scratched and bruised. He stepped briskly into the cottage, deposited his gun in one corner of the room, over which he cast a hasty glance, which gave him a tolerably correct estimate of the value of each article, however.

Extending his brawny hand to Olenine, he said:

"*Koshkildy*, that is to say in Tartar: 'I wish you good health. Peace be unto you.'"

"Yes, I know," replied Olenine, accepting the proffered hand. "*Koshkildy.*"

"Ha, ha! you know nothing at all about it! How stupid you are!" exclaimed Jerochka, shaking his head reproachfully. "When I say 'Koshkildy!' you ought to reply, 'Allah razi bo sun'—'Heaven preserve you,' and not repeat *Koshkildy*. I will teach you. It was just the same with Ilia Masseitch, one of your Russians, who came here. We were the best of friends. He was a splendid fellow, a capital drinker—and what a shot he was! I taught him everything."

"And what will you teach me?" inquired Olenine, becoming more and more interested in the old man.

"I'll teach you how to hunt and fish, and ride like the Circassians, and if you want a sweetheart, I'll find one for you. That's the kind of a man I am!" Here the old hunter began to laugh. "I am tired; may I sit down? *Karga!*" he added.

"And what does that word mean?"

"*Karga* means 'good,' in the Georgian tongue. It is my favorite word. When I say *karga* I am always in a

good humor. But say, why don't they bring out the wine? You have a soldier to wait on you, I suppose?"

"Yes. Here, Ivan!" called Olenine.

"All you Russians are named Ivan. Is your name Ivan, too? I say, my good fellow," he continued, seeing Vania appear in answer to his master's summons, "go and ask the old woman for some wine from that keg she just opened. Its the best in the village, but don't give more than thirty kopecks a quart. Our people are the biggest fools imaginable," he added, in a confidential tone as soon as Vania left the cottage; "they regard you as brutes. They have an even poorer opinion of you than of the Tartars. As for me, a man is a man in my estimation; he has a soul even if he is a soldier. Don't you think I am right? Ilia Masseitch was a soldier, and he had a heart of gold. These are my sentiments, and some of our people don't think very well of me on account of them, but that doesn't trouble me much. I take life easy, and I am fond of everybody. That is the best way, isn't it, father?" and as he spoke the old hunter tapped the young man on the shoulder almost caressingly.

CHAPTER XII.

VANIA was now in the best possible humor. He had had time to put his establishment in order, to get shaved at the barber's, and to pull his trousers out of his boot-legs in acknowledgment of the fact that his company was now in very comfortable quarters. He bestowed a scrutinizing and rather malevolent glance at Jerochka, whom he evidently regarded as a strange kind of wild beast, and after shaking his head at the sight of the mud-stained floor, he took a couple of empty bottles from under the bench, and went in search of the owner of the house.

"Good-evening, my friends," he began, resolved to be as polite and amiable as possible; "my master would like

to purchase some newly made wine. Please give me some of the best you have."

Mother Oulita made no reply. Her daughter was standing before a little mirror arranging a handkerchief on her head, and she turned toward Vania, but without uttering a word.

"I will pay whatever you ask, my good friends," continued Vania, rattling some silver in his pocket. "If you will be accommodating we will be the same. It is much better to live in peace than in discord."

"How much wine do you want?" asked the old woman, brusquely.

"A gallon."

"Go and get it for him," said Dame Oulita, turning to her daughter. "Draw it from the cask we just opened, my dear."

The young girl took the keys and left the room, followed by Vania.

"Tell me who that is?" inquired Olenine, seeing Marianna pass the window.

The old hunter winked and nudged his host.

"Wait," he said, putting his head out of the window. "Hem, hem!" beginning to cough, "Marianouchka, I say, Marianouchka, give me a kiss, won't you? Ain't I a funny fellow?" he whispered, turning to Olenine.

The young girl glanced behind her, all the while continuing on her way with the firm, elastic tread peculiar to Cossack women.

"If you'll be my sweetheart you'll be a happy girl," cried Jerochka. Then, again addressing his companion: "I say, isn't she a beauty, a regular stunner?"

"She is very beautiful," replied Olenine. "Get her to come in, can't you?"

"No, no, Lukashka is going to marry her; Lukashka, the young Cossack who just killed an Abrek. I'll find you a handsomer girl. I've said it, and I'll keep my word."

"What an old sinner you are!" exclaimed Olenine, laughing.

"And why?" retorted the old hunter. "Is it any sin to look at a pretty girl? Is it any sin to love her? That may be your opinion; it certainly isn't mine. God, who made you, made women too. He created everything. No, to admire a pretty girl is no sin. She was made to be loved and admired."

Marianna crossed the court-yard and entered the wine-cellar. Vania remained in the door-way watching the girl, who looked very odd to him in her one cotton garment, so scant in the back and short in front; but it was her necklace of silver coins that amused him most. He said to himself that the people in his native town would laugh heartily at the sight of such a girl. "Still she is very well for a change, and I'll tell my master so," he said to himself.

"What are you waiting for, you idiot?" cried the girl, suddenly. "Give me the jug."

She filled it with ruby wine, and handed it to Vania.

"Give the money to my mother," she said, drawing back haughtily, as Vania offered her some silver.

Vania smiled.

"Why are you so crabbed, my dear?" he said, good-naturedly, as the girl put the bung in the keg.

Marianna laughed in turn.

"We are very nice people, my master and I," continued Vania. "We are so nice that the people have always been charmed with us wherever we have lived. We are no common trash, you must understand. My master is a nobleman."

The young girl paused to listen.

"Is your master married?" she asked.

"No, he's a bachelor. Noblemen never marry young."

"That's a good joke. As big as a buffalo and too young to marry. Is he in command of the company?"

"My master is only a color-bearer; that is to say, he is not an officer yet, but he is of greater importance than many a general. He is a very exalted personage, for not only our colonel, but the czar himself knows him. We are not paupers either, like so many army officers. Our father was a senator, who owned more than a thousand serfs, and they send us thousands of rubles at a time. That is one reason we are such favorites. What's the use of being a captain if one hasn't any money?"

"Go on now; I want to shut the door," interrupted the girl.

So Vania took the wine to Olenine, remarking in French that the Cossack girl was very pretty, and then burst into a silly laugh.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE sun had disappeared behind the snow-clad mountains, and twilight was gradually creeping over earth and sky. The inhabitants of the village were returning from their work, and the streets were full of bellowing cattle enveloped in a thick cloud of dust. Soon, the labors of the day being ended, the Cossack girls gathered on the street corners and upon the terraces in front of their cottages. Marianna, having milked the buffalo and two other cows, joined one of these groups, which was composed of several women and an aged Cossack.

The shooting of the Abrek was the subject of their conversation. The Cossack was giving an account of their enemy's death, and the women were questioning him about it.

"He will probably receive a large reward," remarked one of them, referring of course to Lukashka.

"Certainly. They say he'll get the cross."

"The corporal served him a mean trick, though. He

took the Abrek's gun, but the authorities at Kizliar have found it out."

"What a scoundrel that corporal is."

"They say Lukashka has come back," remarked one of the young girls.

"Yes; he's at Yamka's" (a well-known drinking saloon), "drinking with Nazarka. They say they've drunk a gallon already."

"How lucky Lukashka always is; but he's a nice honest fellow. So was his father before him. The whole village mourned when he was killed. Look! there they come now," continued the speaker, pointing to some men who were coming up the street. "Ergouchou is with them. The old drunkard ferretted them out of course."

As they approached the group Ergouchou staggered, laughed noisily and nearly knocked Nazarka over.

"Why ain't you singing, you wenches?" he cried, boisterously. "Give us a song, I say."

"And why should we be singing, I'd like to know?" retorted one of the group. "This isn't a fête day. Sing yourself if you want to. You are drunk enough."

Uncle Ergouchou laughed and nudged Nazarka. "Sing," said he, "and I'll sing with you. Begin; I'm ready."

Lukashka had approached more deliberately. Removing his cap he now paused in front of the girls. His cheeks and neck were very red. He spoke quietly and sedately, yet in all his movements and words there was much more life and animation than in Nazarka's garrulous excitement. He might be compared to a spirited horse which neighs and prances and then suddenly comes down upon his four feet and remains there motionless. His eyes sparkled with merriment, though he said little as he glanced first at his intoxicated companions and then at the girls. As Marianna approached he made way for her, slowly lifting his cap, then placed himself opposite her with his thumb stuck in

his belt. Marianna replied to his salute with a slight nod, then seated herself on the ground and took some sunflower seeds from her bosom. Lukashka did not take his eyes off her, but he, too, began crunching the seeds. After Marianna joined them there was a moment's silence.

"Are you going to stay long?" inquired one of the women at last.

"Only until to-morrow morning," answered Lukashka, gravely.

"May Heaven shower its richest blessings upon you!" said the aged Cossack. "I rejoice at your good fortune, as I just remarked."

"And so do I," cried Ergouchou. "Just see the fine company we've got now," he added, pointing to a passing soldier.

"They've quartered three of the devils on us," remarked one of the women. "My husband complained to our chief, but he could do nothing to prevent it."

"So you only had your labor for your pains."

"Have they scented up everything in your house with tobacco smoke?" asked one of the women.

"No, they only smoke in the court-yard; we won't allow them to do it in the house. Even if the commander ordered it, I wouldn't allow them to do it. They steal everything they can lay their hands on, and the station keeper knows it, son of the devil that he is. He hasn't any soldiers at his house, I notice."

"He doesn't like them," said Ergouchou.

"And that isn't all," said Nazarka, trying to imitate Lukashka, and pushing his cap back on the nape of his neck; "they say the Cossack girls will be ordered to make the soldiers' beds and to treat them on wine and honey."

Ergouchou laughed boisterously, and seizing the girl nearest him kissed her, exclaiming:

"Yes, it's true; every word of it."

"Let me alone!" cried the girl. "I'll tell my mother of you."

"Tell her," exclaimed Ergouchou. "What Nazarka says is true. You'll see a printed bulletin to that effect out to-morrow." And as he spoke he hugged the next girl, who chanced to be the plump, rosy-cheeked Oustinka.

"Don't touch me, you rascal!" she cried, shaking her fist at her persecutor.

The Cossack staggered.

"Don't tell me women are weak," he cried. "This one has nearly killed me."

"Be off, you old scamp!" was the laughing retort. "What a pity it is the Abrek didn't see you and kill you."

All this time Lukashka had not once taken his eyes off Marianna, and it was very evident that the scrutiny embarrassed the young girl.

"They say one of the officers is staying at your house," he said at last, stepping a little closer to Marianna.

As usual, that young girl was rather slow in replying, but she raised her large dark eyes to the Cossack's face.

An old woman answered for her.

"Yes, they are very fortunate in having two houses," she remarked. "Tomouchkeni has but one, and they have quartered one of the officers on him. The house is filled with the Russian's traps, and the family don't know what to do with themselves. I don't know why such a drove of them should be sent to our village. What is to become of us? They must be up to some deviltry."

"I heard they were going to build a bridge across the Terek," remarked one of the young girls.

"I heard they were going to dig an enormous hole and throw all the girls who are not fond of young men into it."

Everybody laughed, and Ergouchou threw his arms around an old woman, skipping Marianna, who was next in order.

"Why don't you hug Marianna? It was her turn," cried Nazarka.

"I like my old woman best; she's the sweetest," cried Ergouchou, covering her face with kisses in spite of her struggles to free herself.

"Where does the officer lodge?" inquired Lukashka, stepping still closer to Marianna.

She reflected a moment, then replied:

"In the new cottage."

"Is he young or old?" asked the Cossack, seating himself beside her.

"How should I know? I went to draw some wine for him, and caught a glimpse of him at the window with Jerochka. He has red hair, I think, and he brought a whole wagon load of baggage."

"How glad I am I got leave," said Lukashka, gazing searchingly at the young girl.

"Are you going to stay long?" inquired his companion, with a faint smile.

"Only until to-morrow morning. Give me some seeds," he added, holding out his hand.

She complied with the request, smiling frankly.

"I was dying to see you again, indeed I was," said the young man. Then he added something in a whisper, smiling the while.

"Once for all I tell you I won't come," suddenly answered Marianna aloud, and drawing away from him.

"I assure you I have something of great importance to say to you. Come, Machinka, do be reasonable."

Marianna shook her head, though she still smiled.

"Marianka, sister Marianka, mother wants you to come to supper," cried the girl's little brother, running up to the group.

"I'm coming. Run along, child. I'll be there in a moment."

Lukashka rose and lifted his cap.

"It is time for me to go, too," he said, with pretended indifference, and in another moment he had disappeared around the corner of the next street.

It was quite dark now, and myriads of stars were glittering in the heavens. The streets were dark and comparatively deserted. The laughter of Nazarka and his companions was distinctly audible. For a minute or two after leaving them Lukashka sauntered leisurely along, but as soon as he was out of their sight he darted off, not in the direction of his own home, but toward the cornet's cottage. After traversing two streets on the run he paused, and, crouching down in the shadow of a hedge, he gathered the skirts of his long coat around him.

"What a proud little devil she is!" he said to himself, referring to Marianna; "but wait."

The sound of a woman's footsteps aroused him from these reflections. Marianna was coming straight toward him with bowed head, walking with a rapid but even tread and striking the hedge with a long switch she held in her hand. Lukashka suddenly rose. Marianna gave a violent start.

"Oh, you rascal! how you frightened me! So you didn't go home at all." And she burst into a hearty laugh.

Lukashka slipped one arm about the girl's waist, and with his other hand turned her face up to his.

"I have something to say to you. Pray—" His voice was husky and broken.

"What can you have to say to me on this particular night? Mother is waiting for me, and you—you had better go and see your sweetheart."

As she spoke she freed herself from his grasp, and ran on a few steps. When she reached the gate of her own yard, however, she paused and turned to the Cossack, who had been following her and beseeching her to grant him a moment's hearing.

"Well, what do you want to say to me?" she asked, laughing.

"Don't laugh at me, I beg of you, Marianna. "What if I had got a sweetheart, I'll let her go to the devil if you but say the word; I'll do whatever you wish. Do you hear that?" he continued, rattling some silver in his pocket. "We might as well enjoy ourselves. Everybody else does, while I—thanks to you, Marianouchka—have no pleasure whatever."

The girl made no reply, but with a rapid movement broke the switch she was carrying into tiny pieces.

Lukashka suddenly clinched his fists and set his teeth.

"Why must I always wait and wait? Do you think I don't love you enough. Do what you like with me!" he exclaimed, seizing both her hands in a paroxysm of mingled rage and passion.

Marianna remained perfectly calm.

"Don't rave, Lukashka, but listen to me," she said, without drawing her hands from his grasp, but keeping the Cossack at a distance; "I am only a young girl, but you must listen to me. I am not my own mistress, but if you love me, listen. Let go my hands. I want to speak to you. I will marry you, but don't expect me to be guilty of any foolishness for your sake—never!"

"You will marry me. Yes, but that will be arranged without any action on our part, but I want you to love me, Marianouchka," said Lucas, suddenly laying aside his ferocious manner and becoming gentle, even humble, as he gazed at the maiden with a tender smile.

Marianna suddenly threw her arms around his neck and pressed a kiss upon his lips.

"Brother!" * she whispered; then tearing herself from his embrace, she darted into the court-yard regardless of the entreaties of the young Cossack, who was begging her

* Brother and cousin are words of endearment among this tribe.

to listen to him a moment longer. "Go away; some one will see you!" she exclaimed. "There's that devil of a Russian walking about the court-yard now."

CHAPTER XIV.

OLENINE was in the court-yard when Marianna entered it, and heard her allusion to himself distinctly. He had spent the evening on the porch in company with Uncle Jerochka. At his master's request, Vania had brought out a table and placed a tea-urn and lighted candle upon it, and Olenine sipped his tea and smoked his cigar there while he listened to the stories of the old hunter, who sat on the steps at his feet. The candle flickered in spite of the stillness of the air, and the wavering light fell now on the table and tea service, now on the hoary head of the old Cossack. Myriads of moths flew about, scattering the dust from their wings, beating themselves against the table and glasses, and sometimes dashing recklessly into the flame, or suddenly disappearing in the darkness outside of the luminous circle. Olenine and Jerochka emptied five bottles of wine; and each time the old hunter filled his glass he touched it to that of Olenine and drank to his new friend's health and prosperity. He talked incessantly, describing the mode of life of his ancestors, boasting of the achievements of his father, who could shoulder with ease a wild boar weighing three hundred and fifty pounds, and who had once drunk two gallons of wine at a sitting. He talked, too, of the good times he had enjoyed in former years, and of his friend Guirtchik, and how they had once killed two noble stags in one morning. He talked so eloquently, and his descriptions were so graphic, that Olenine had no idea how rapidly time was passing.

"Yes, that is the way we used to live!" he exclaimed. "It's a pity that you could not have made my acquaintance in my youth. I'm not good for much now; but I

was a very different sort of a fellow once. Who had the finest horse and the finest rifle? Who was sent into the mountains to kill Ahmed Khan? Who was considered the pleasantest companion and the heaviest drinker? Jerochka—always Jerochka! Who was the favorite of the women? Jerochka. There are no such Cossacks nowadays. They wear boots and conduct themselves like idiots generally. It was not the stations alone that knew me, but the mountains as well. Some princes came down here; they made me their friend and companion. With Tartars I was a Tartar; with Armenians an Armenian; with privates a private; with officers an officer. I made no distinction between them, provided they drained their glasses dry, though I was often told that I ought to purify myself on account of my intercourse with infidels, and that I ought not to drink with a Russian soldier or eat with a Tartar."

"Who told you that?"

"Our priests. On the other hand, a Tartar cadi calls us infidel dogs, and nothing could induce him to eat with us. In short, every man has his creed; and in my opinion every faith is good. God created man to be happy; there is no sin in anything. Take an animal, for example. He lives among our rushes as well as among those of the Tartars; it is home to him wherever he happens to be; he takes what God gives him. And our priests assure us that we shall burn in hell for doing the same. I don't believe a word of it," he added, after a moment's reflection. "The Circassians once killed a friend of mine," he continued, "a brave, good-looking fellow like myself. He used to say that the priests invented all such things. 'We shall all die,' he used to say, 'and the grass will grow over our graves; and that is all there is about it.' He was a wild, reckless sort of a fellow."

"How old are you?" asked Olenine.

"God only knows. About seventy, probably. I was no

child when the czarina reigned; so you can form some idea. Over seventy, I suppose."

"Yes; but you are still hale and hearty."

"Yes, God be thanked, I am well—very well. A wicked sorceress has cast a spell over me, though."

"What?"

"Yes, she has cast a spell over me—"

"So, after our death the grass will grow upon our graves," repeated Olenine, thoughtfully.

But Jerochka did not seem inclined to explain his theories more fully; in fact, he remained silent for several minutes.

"Well, what do you think about it?" he exclaimed at last, smilingly. "Suppose we take another drink?" he added, holding out his glass.

CHAPTER XV.

"WHAT was I talking about?" continued Jerochka. "Oh! I know. Well, this is the kind of a man I am. I'm a hunter. My equal isn't to be found among the Cossacks. I know the habits of every known beast and bird. I have dogs, two carbines, nets, a falcon, and everything I need, thank God! If you are really fond of hunting, I will show you all the good places. I'm the man to track a wild beast for you. I know its lair and its drinking places. I put up a rough hunting lodge, and watch there all night. What is the use of staying at home? One is sure to be led into temptation. One gets drunk; women torment one half to death with their silly gossip, and the children are always quarreling and fighting. How much more pleasant it is to get up before sunrise and find some snug little place in which to wait for your prey. You can see all that is going on in the forest, and gaze at the sky, and watch the stars come out and try to guess what time it is. You hear a crackling among the bushes. It is a wild boar, perhaps, approaching. You can hear the shrill cries of the young

eagles and of the wild geese, and the crowing of the cocks in the neighboring village. When you hear the geese you may know that it is not midnight. If you hear the sound of a gun in the distance a thousand fancies assail you. I say to myself: I wonder who fired it? Is it some Cossack watching for his prey, like myself? Has he killed the beast or only wounded it? I can't bear the thought of the poor thing staining the reeds with his blood. 'Fool, fool!' I say, 'why do you torture the beast?' Or I wonder if some Abrek has killed a poor Cossack. One day, while I was sitting on the bank of the river, I saw a cradle float by. One side was broken a little, but that was all. Where could it have come from? Some devilish soldiers had probably attacked a Circassian village, carried away the women, and perhaps killed the child. Your men have no hearts. Suddenly I hear a loud crackling sound in the thicket. 'Come on, I am ready for you!' I say to myself. I remain motionless, though my heart is beating like a sledge-hammer. This spring a whole drove came rushing out of the woods not far from me. I said, 'In the name of the Father and of the Son,' and was about to pull the trigger when the old sow suddenly cried to her little ones: 'Look out, children, there's a man yonder!' and they all rushed back like mad into the bushes. I was frantic with rage."

"How did the sow explain to her pigs that a man was watching them?" inquired Olenine.

"You don't believe me, perhaps. Do you think that wild animals are fools? No; a sow is much more intelligent than a man, even if she is only a sow. She notices everything. A man crosses her track without even being aware of it, but the sow scents yours out directly. It is true that you try to kill her, and that she thinks only of living and of roaming about the forest. You have your ambition and she has hers. She is only a hog; but she is no worse than you are; and she is just as much one of the

works of God as you are. A man is only a poor fool, after all—only a poor fool!" repeated the old hunter, relapsing into a reverie.

Olenine, too, began to dream. Descending the steps and crossing his hands behind his back, he began to walk up and down the yard.

Shortly afterward Uncle Jerochka raised his head and began to watch a moth that was hovering about the flame.

"Fool, fool! what are you about?" he muttered. He rose and drove away the moth with his brawny hands. "You'll get burned up, you idiot! Get away from here; there is plenty of room in the world for you," he added, almost tenderly, and with his big fingers he tried to seize the tiny creature by its wings and remove it to a place of safety. "You're killing yourself, poor thing; and I feel sorry for you."

He sat there a long time talking to himself and drinking, while Olenine remained in the yard below. A sound of subdued voices near the gate at last attracted the latter's attention; he listened, and heard a stifled laugh, a man's voice, and the sound of a kiss. He turned and walked toward the house rather noisily, in order to warn the new-comers of his presence. A moment afterward the gate creaked, a Cossack in a dark uniform and white cap passed down the street, and a tall woman with her head enveloped in a white handkerchief walked swiftly past Olenine. He watched her until she reached the door of the cornet's cottage, then, through the window, he saw her seat herself on a bench and remove her handkerchief. Suddenly such a sensation of utter loneliness seized him that a thousand vague desires and an almost unconscious jealousy took possession of his heart.

One by one the lights in the cottages were extinguished, and a profound stillness settled down upon the scene. The cattle, the fences, the roofs of the houses, and the slender plane-trees all seemed to be sleeping a quiet and profound

sleep. The croaking of the frogs in a neighboring marsh was the only sound audible. The stars were becoming less numerous in the east, but in the zenith they were growing more and more crowded and brilliant. The old Cossack was sleeping soundly, with his head resting on his hand. A cock crowed in the court-yard, in which Olenine was still pacing to and fro absorbed in thought.

The sound of several voices singing reached his ear, and he walked to the fence and listened. The voices were all fresh and youthful, and high above them all rose one, clear and strong, overpowering all the others.

"Do you know who that is singing?" asked the old hunter, waking from his slumber. "It is Lukashka. He killed an Abrek yesterday, and he is celebrating the event. As if it were anything to rejoice over—fool that he is!"

"Did you ever kill any one?" inquired Olenine.

The old hunter raised himself suddenly upon both elbows, and put his face close to that of his companion.

"Why the devil do you ask me that?" he exclaimed. "That's a subject that should not be talked about. It is an easy matter to lose one's soul—a very easy matter. Farewell, father, I've drunk quite enough. Will you go hunting with me to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Be ready early then."

"I shall be up before you are, I suspect."

The old man went away. The singing had ceased; but one could still hear footsteps and merry talk. After a few moments the song was begun again, further off, and this time the powerful voice of Jerochka mingled with the others. What a strange people and what a strange life! thought Olenine with a sigh as he re-entered the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNCLE JEROCHKA had faithfully performed his term of military service, and had been honorably retired. His wife had deserted him twenty years before, after embracing the orthodox faith, and had afterward married a Russian sergeant. He had no children.

He spoke the truth when he declared that he had once been the handsomest man at the station. He was famous in the army for his deeds of prowess, and he was responsible for the death of more than one Abrek and Russian, for he had haunted the mountain passes and robbed Russians without number, and had twice been in prison. He now spent most of his time in hunting in the forest, where he lived upon bread and water for days at a time; but when he returned to the station he drank from morning until night to make up for it. On returning home from Olenine's house he slept a couple of hours; but on waking long before daybreak, he remained in bed thinking about the man whose acquaintance he had just made.

The guilelessness of his new friend pleased him—that is to say, the guilelessness he displayed in serving out his wine so lavishly; besides, he had taken a strong fancy to him personally. He wondered why it was that the Russians were all so rich and ignorant, in spite of their education. He asked himself these questions over and over again, and also what personal advantages he might perhaps derive from a friendship with Olenine.

Jerochka's cottage was tolerably large and still new; but a woman's presence was evidently wanting. For in spite of the Cossack's reputation for neatness, the house was untidy and in great disorder. On the table lay a caftan stained with blood, the remnant of a loaf and a jay intend-

ed for the falcon. On the benches were old shoes, a gun, a dagger, a bag or two, some wet clothes, and several piles of rags, while in one corner of the room stood a basin of dirty water, in which some bits of leather were soaking, and a rifle and rest.

On the floor lay a net and some dead pheasants, and under the table, fastened to it by one leg, was a hen pecking at the dirty floor. A broken pot filled with a milky liquid stood by the fireless stove, and on the stove itself was perched a falcon, that seemed to be struggling hard to free itself from the cord that held it. Uncle Jerochka himself was lying upon his back on the rather diminutive bed, which stood between the stove and the wall.

"Are you at home, uncle?" cried a shrill voice outside the window—a voice the old hunter instantly recognized as that of Lukashka.

"Yes, yes; come in, neighbor Marka. Are you on your way back to the outpost?"

The old Cossack was very fond of Lukashka; indeed, he was the only member of the rising generation for whom he did not evince a profound contempt. Lukashka and his mother, who were near neighbors to the old man, frequently brought him wine, curds and other delicacies of a similar kind. Jerochka, who was in the habit of speaking his mind freely upon all occasions, explained the kindness of his neighbors in an eminently practical way. "I give them pheasants and wild boar meat," he remarked, "and they, in return, keep me in pies and cake."

"Good-day, Marka; I'm glad to see you," cried the old hunter, gayly. "Are you going back now?"

"No, I came to bring the wine I promised you."

"May Christ save you!" cried the old man, devoutly, as he gathered together his scattered garments and began to dress himself. After putting on his clothing and confining it about the waist with a leather belt, he poured some water on his hands, wiped them on an old pair of pantaloons,

smoothed his hair and beard with a bit of comb, and then came and seated himself in front of Lukashka.

"I'm ready!" said he.

Lukashka got a glass, wiped it, filled it, and then sitting down on a bench, presented it to his host.

"To your good health! In the name of the Father, and of the Son!" said the old man, solemnly accepting the goblet. "May you obtain your heart's desire. May you always be a brave man and receive the cross."

Lukashka also repeated a prayer before he drunk. The old man then went and got a dried fish, placed it on the threshold, where he pounded it with a stick to make it tender, after which he placed it on the only china plate he possessed, and set it on the table.

"I have all I need, thank God!" he said, proudly. "Well, what is Mosef up to now?"

Lukashka told him of the corporal's appropriation of the rifle, and asked the old hunter's advice.

"Let him keep it," said Jerochka; "if you don't make him a present of it you won't get the reward."

"As for that, uncle, they say I'm not entitled to it, because I'm still a minor,* and it is a fine Crimean rifle, worth eighty rubles."

"Oh, well, think no more about it. I had just such a quarrel once with my superior officer about a horse he wanted to take from me. 'Give me the horse,' he said, 'and you shall be promoted.' I refused, and that was the end of me."

"But what am I to do, uncle? I must have a horse, and they say I can't get one on the other side of the river for less than fifty rubles, and mother hasn't sold her wine yet."

"Pshaw! that needn't trouble you. When I was your

* Those who have never served on horseback in the ranks are called minors by the Cossacks.

age I had stolen whole herds of them and driven them across the river. More than once I've sold a fine horse for a gallon of brandy or a sheep-skin coat."

"But why did you sell them so cheap?"

"I couldn't help it, you simpleton; besides, when the goods are stolen one can afford to be generous. As for you, you know where to get hold of a horse probably. Why don't you answer?"

"Times have changed since then, uncle."

"Times have changed?" repeated the old hunter, scornfully. "Say rather that men have changed. I was certainly very different at your age."

"But what is one to do?"

The old hunter sniffed contemptuously.

"Uncle Jerochka was brave and generous, so all the Circassians were my friends," he replied. "When one of them came to my house I gave him plenty to drink and gave up my bed to him. When I went to see him I always carried him a present. That is the way to live, and not as people live now. Young men nowadays amuse themselves by crunching sunflower seeds and spitting out the hulls," concluded the old man, imitating the movements of those thus engaged.

"You are right, uncle."

"Do you want to be of any account? If you do, be a *jigit* and not a peasant. It doesn't show any smartness to buy a horse; pay the money for him and take him away."

They were both silent for several minutes.

"You have no idea how dull it is at the outpost and at the station," remarked Lukashka, at last. "They are all timid from Nazarka down. Not long ago Guirei-Khan wanted us to go and drive off some horses from the Circassians, and not a person would consent to go. Of course I couldn't go alone."

"You've forgotten me. Do you think your old uncle

has dried up and blown away? No, I still live. Get me a horse and I'll start off at once."

"That's all nonsense," retorted Lukashka. "Tell me what I had better do about Guirei-Khan. He promised to find a place to hide the horses if I would get them as far as the Terek, but I'm not sure that I can trust him."

"Oh, you need feel no anxiety about that. He comes of a good family; his father was a trusted friend of mine. Make him take an oath, and then you can believe him, though when you start off with him you had better have your pistol near at hand. Above all, be on your guard when you divide the horses. A Circassian came within an ace of killing me one day because I asked him ten rubles for a horse. Yes, you can trust the fellow, but have your weapons within your reach, even when you are asleep."

Lukashka listened attentively.

"Is it true that you have a magical herb?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"No, it isn't; but I'll tell you where to find one, because you are a good fellow and kind to your old uncle. Go find a tortoise's nest, and then make a little fence around it, so the tortoise can't get out. It will go round and round in a circle and search for the magic herb to break down the fence. The next morning early go and look for the gap in the fence, and there you will find the herb. Take it and keep it about you, and all will be well with you."

"Did you ever try it?"

"No, but plenty of people have. I never had any other charm than a 'Hail' when I mounted my horse."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you never hear of that? Oh, these people nowadays! You do well to consult me. Listen and repeat the words after me."

The exorcism began with:

"Hail thou who dwellest in Zion—" The rest was untranslatable.

Lukashka began to laugh.

"Was that the reason you were never killed, or was it only your good luck?" he asked.

"Oh, you young men of the present day all think yourselves so wise! Learn the words and repeat them; you won't be any the worse for it. You had better keep away from the Nogaïs, though, Luka."

"Why?"

"Because times have changed, and you are all a set of cowards. Look at the crowd of Russians they have quartered upon us. They would arrest you and try you, I suppose. Let the matter alone. You are not equal to it. It was very different when I went with Guirtchek—"

Evidently the old man was about to begin one of his interminable stories. Lukashka glanced out of the window.

"It is broad daylight now, uncle, and time for me to be going," he said, hastily. "Come and see me soon."

"Christ preserve you! I must go over to the officer's now. I promised to take him hunting to-day; he seems to be a very nice sort of a fellow."

CHAPTER XVII.

As Lukashka wended his way homeward a thick mist rose from the ground, enveloping the whole village. Cocks were crowing lustily on every side, and the cattle were already making their way toward the plain. It was not until he had nearly reached his gate that the fence and the cottage-porch became visible. His mother was up and engaged in making a fire. His younger sister was still asleep in bed.

"Well, have you got enough of it?" asked his mother. "Where did you spend the night?"

"In the village," replied her son, rather ungraciously, picking up his rifle and examining it.

His mother shook her head.

"I asked you to mend my game-bag; have you done it?"

"Your sister mended it last night. Are you going back to the outpost already? I have scarcely seen you."

"I must get off as soon as I can. Where is Stepka?"

"She's cutting wood, I think. She misses you dreadfully. 'I shall never see him again!' she is always saying, in her way, you know. I'll call her. She understood all about the Abrek."

"Yes, call her."

The old woman went out, and in a few minutes Stepka entered. She was six years older than her brother, and deaf and dumb. The resemblance between them would have been striking but for the dull and stolid expression peculiar to deaf mutes. She wore a coarse blue gown, her feet were bare and dirty, and her head was covered with an old blue handkerchief. Her neck, hands and face were as coarse as those of a peasant, and her clothing and whole appearance testified to the hard labor she was accustomed to perform. She brought in an armful of wood and put it in the stove; then she went up to her brother with a joyous smile on her face, and tapping him lightly on the shoulder she began to make signs to him with her hands, and indeed with her whole body.

"All right, all right, Stepka," replied Lukashka, with a nod. "You have mended everything up nicely. You're a good girl, and here is something for you," he added, drawing a couple of ginger-cakes from his pocket.

The face of the dumb girl crimsoned with joy. She seized the ginger-cakes, and began to make even more rapid signs, passing her coarse fingers over her eyebrows and face. Lukashka understood her, and nodded and smiled. She was telling him that he ought to give such dainties to

the young girls, that Marianka was the prettiest of them all, and that she loved Lukashka. She indicated Marianka by pointing to her cottage, and passing her hands over her forehead and face. Marianka's affection was indicated by pressing her hands on her heart, kissing her hand, and pretending to embrace some one. The mother re-entered the house, and seeing what was going on, smiled and nodded.

"I spoke to Oulita the other day," she remarked, "and she seemed to think favorably of it."

Lukashka made no reply.

"I must have a horse, mother," he said, after a little, "so you had better sell the wine."

"I'll send the wine to market when the proper time comes," said the mother, evidently not desirous that her son should meddle with the affairs of the household. "When you go, take the little bag that you see on the porch. I have put something in it for you."

"Very well, and if Guieri-Khan should come here to see me, send him to the outpost, for I sha'n't be able to get off again for a long time, and I want to see him on business."

"I will, Luka, I will. Did you spend the night at Yamka's. I got up to see about the cattle, and thought I heard you singing."

Lukashka took no notice of the question, but stepped out on the porch, slung his game-bag over his shoulder, and picked up his coat and rifle; then he came back to the door-way.

"Good-bye, mother," said he; "send me a small cask of wine by Nazarka. I have promised it to the boys."

"May Christ watch over you, Lukashka! God be with you! I will send you the wine," said the old woman, following him to the gate; "but listen to me a minute."

The Cossack paused.

"You have been amusing yourself here, thank God! A

young man must enjoy himself a little. That is all right, but, my son, you must take care and not carry it too far. Above all things, you must be respectful to your superior officers. As for the wine, I will sell it, and you shall have your horse and marry the young girl."

"Very well, very well," replied the young man, knitting his brow.

The dumb girl uttered a cry to attract his attention, then pointed to her head and then to her hand, thus signifying a shaven head, or the head of a Circassian; then she pretended to load and fire off a rifle, which pantomime meant that she hoped Lukashka would soon kill another Abrek.

Her brother understood her and smiled in response, then protecting his rifle with his sheep-skin coat, he walked briskly away, and was soon lost to view in the dense morning fog.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IMMEDIATELY after his guest's departure Uncle Jerochka whistled to his dogs, jumped over the fence and made his way through the back streets to Olenine's cottage, for he was always particular to avoid any meeting with women when he went hunting. Olenine was still asleep, and Vania, though awake, was still in bed, wondering whether it was time to get up or not, when Jerochka, with his gun on his shoulder, and in full hunting array, opened the door.

The Abreks are upon us!" he shouted. "Sound the alarm. Ivan, make your master's tea at once. Come, come, get up," he continued, addressing Olenine. "The girls are all up and going for water, and you still in bed!"

Olenine sprang up. The sight of the old Cossack and the sound of his voice were both cheering and inspiring.

"Make haste, Vania, make haste," he cried, gayly.

"So this is the way you go hunting. Honest people have finished breakfast, and you are still in bed. Lion! here, where are you going? Is your gun in order?"

"I ought to be ashamed of myself, I admit," said Olenine.

"Yes, you must be fined."

"*Voulez vous du thé?*" asked Vania, smiling.

"What devil's jargon are you talking?" shouted the old man, laughing until he showed every tooth in his head.

"A first offense should be forgiven," said Olenine, good-naturedly.

"Oh! I'll overlook it this time, but if you sin again in the same way you are to give me a gallon of wine. You must remember that you have no chance of finding a stag as soon as it gets warm."

"And even if we should find one, he is cleverer than we are, and so will be sure to escape us," said Olenine, repeating the old man's words of the night before.

"You're poking fun at me. All right; wait until you kill a stag before you begin to talk. But look! here's your landlord coming to see you," said Jerochka, glancing out of the window. "How fine he is! He has put on a new coat, so you can see that he is an official."

The words had hardly fallen from the old hunter's lips when Vania ushered the visitor into the room. He was gorgeous to behold in his new uniform coat, adorned with an officer's shoulder straps, and his carefully polished boots —a marvel, indeed, in the Cossack world.

Ilea Vassilitch was an educated Cossack. He had visited Russia, and he desired above all else to appear the gentleman; but beneath his affectation and assurance the same coarse Cossack nature, so forcibly represented in Uncle Jerochka, was plainly visible. It showed itself unmistakably in his sunburned face, his hands and his red nose. Olenine invited him to be seated.

"Good-day, father; good-day, Ilea Vassilitch," said

Jerochka, rising and bowing profoundly, though with a slightly ironical air, as it seemed to Olenine.

"Good-day, uncle. Are you here already?" replied the cornet, with a careless nod.

The new-comer was about forty years of age, tall and slim, and remarkably youthful in appearance for a person of his age. It was evident that he felt considerable fear lest his new lodger should mistake him for a common Cossack, and that he was desirous of impressing him with his importance at once.

"This is our Nimrod," he continued, complacently, pointing to Jerochka, "a hunter famous throughout the length and breadth of the land. You have made his acquaintance already, I see."

"Yes, we are about to start out on a hunt together."

"Indeed! Well, I have a little business matter to arrange with you."

"I am entirely at your service."

"You are a nobleman, I understand," began the cornet; "and as I am an officer, we can discuss the matter as two gentlemen should. If you desire my consent to the lease—for my wife is very obtuse, like all women of her class, and did not exactly understand you the other day—I must inform you that the adjutant is willing and even anxious to lease this cottage of me for six rubles a month, without the stable. I am an officer, and as such I now state my terms to you."

"He talks well," muttered the old hunter in an audible aside.

The cornet continued to talk some time longer in the same style, and Olenine finally managed to understand, though not without considerable difficulty, that he wanted six rubles a month for his cottage. This he very willingly consented to give, and offered his landlord a cup of tea.

"By reason of our absurd prejudice it would be considered a sin for us to use a glass that does not belong to

us," he replied. "Thanks to my education, I am above such prejudices, but my wife, with the weakness of her sex—"

"Will you not take some tea?"

"With pleasure, if you will allow me to send for my own glass," responded the cornet, and stepping out on the porch: "Bring me a glass," he cried, loudly.

In a few minutes the door was opened a little way, and the end of a pink sleeve and a sunburned hand passed in a glass which Olenine filled, and then returned to his landlord.

"I wouldn't detain you for the world," said the cornet, gulping down his hot tea and burning himself badly. "I have a passion for fishing, and I am at home only for a short time, for a vacation, so to speak, so I am going to try my luck and see if I can not get my share of the gifts of the Terek. I trust, however, that you will some day do me the honor to come and take a glass of ancestral wine with me in accordance with the customs of our village."

The cornet bowed, shook hands with Olenine and departed. While Olenine was completing his preparations he heard the athoritative voice of the cornet issuing his orders, and shortly afterward saw him pass the window in a ragged coat, with his fishing net on his shoulder, and with his trousers rolled up above his knees.

"What a scoundrel!" exclaimed Jerochka, finishing his glass. "Are you really going to give him six rubles? Such a thing was never heard of. One can rent the best cottage in the village for two rubles. The wretch! Why, I'll lease you mine for three rubles."

"No, I would rather remain here."

"Six rubles! why that is positively throwing money to the dogs. Here, Ivan, bring in some wine."

It was nearly eight o'clock when Olenine and the old man started. Directly in front of the gate stood an ox-cart, and Marianna, with her face covered up to her eyes

with a white handkerchief, and with a long stick in her hand, was acting as driver.

"Good-morning, my darling," exclaimed Jerochka, pretending that he was about to hug her.

Marianna threatened him with her switch, and favored both men with a long, mischievous glance out of her beautiful, laughing eyes.

"Come on," cried Olenine, throwing his gun across his shoulder, and feeling pleasantly conscious of the girl's gaze.

"Gee! gee!" resounded Marianna's voice behind them, followed by the creaking of the cart as it began to move. As they walked on Jerochka talked almost incessantly about the cornet, whom he abused roundly.

"Why do you dislike him so much?" inquired Olenine.

"Because he is so stingy. I can't bear meanness; besides, what is he hoarding up his money for? He can't carry it away with him. He has two houses, and he has cheated his brother out of a fine vineyard. As for writing documents and the like, you never saw his equal. They even come here from other stations to get him to do such work for them, he is so clever at it. And for whom is he hoarding all this up, I say? He has only one little boy and a girl who will soon marry, probably, and that is all."

"Perhaps he wishes to save up a dowry for his daughter."

"A dowry? Any one would be glad to get her without a dowry. She's a beautiful girl, but the scamp would like to marry her to a rich man. Lukashka, my neighbor and nephew, a fine fellow, the one that killed the Abrek the other day, has been anxious to marry her for a long time, but her father refuses, sometimes upon one plea, sometimes upon another. The girl is too young, he says; but I know what he is after. Luka will get her though, sooner or later. He is the smartest Cossack in the village. He has just killed an Abrek, and he will get the cross."

"Who was it I saw kissing the girl last evening when I was in the yard?"

"You lie!" cried the old man, pausing.

"I swear that I am not."

"Women are the very devil and no mistake," said Jerochka, dubiously. "What kind of a looking fellow was it?"

"I didn't see him very distinctly.

"What kind of a cap did he have on—a white one?"

"Yes."

"And a red coat? Was he about your height?"

"No, taller."

"Then it was he," and Jerochka burst into a hearty laugh. "It was my Marka, that is to say, Lukashka. I call him Marka just for fun. Well, that's a good joke. I was much the same sort of a fellow years ago. It isn't at all worth while for parents to give themselves so much trouble about their daughters. It happened once that my sweetheart was sleeping in a room with her mother and sister-in-law, but in spite of that I succeeded in reaching her. The mother was a regular old witch and hated me like poison. I came under my sweetheart's window with my friend Guirtchek. I climbed upon his shoulders, raised the window and tapped. She was sleeping on a bench near the window. She didn't know me, and she shrieked out: 'Who is it?' I didn't dare to speak, so I took off my cap and covered her mouth with it. She recognized me then, and came out to join me, and brought me curds and grapes, and all sorts of nice things. Nor was she the only one," added Jerochka. "Oh! what a life that was!"

"And now?"

"Oh, all I do now is to follow the dogs, watch a pheasant from behind a tree, and fire at it."

"You ought to try your luck with Marianna."

"Look at that dog. He'll show you something before evening," said the old man, pointing to his favorite, Lion.

They were both silent for a while.

After they had walked about a hundred yards the old

man stopped in front of a branch that had fallen across the road.

"Do you see that?" he asked. "Do you suppose that fell there by chance? No, there's some witchcraft about it. You smile, but remember this: when you see a stick lying across the road never step over it, but either go round it or pick it up, and throw it to one side, saying: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' Then continue on your way, and no misfortune will befall you. My father taught me that."

"What nonsense!" cried Olenine, gayly. "We had better talk about Marianka. Is Lukashka really courting her?"

"Hush, be quiet now. We had better take a short cut through the forest here."

And the old man stepped lightly and stealthily into a path leading into the wood, turning from time to time to scowl at Olenine, who was making a good deal of noise with his heavy boots and hitting his gun against the branches that obstructed the way.

"Be more careful, soldier!" said the old hunter, sternly.

The sun was now high in the heavens, and the fog, though fast disappearing, still concealed the tops of the trees, which seemed to be of fabulous height. With each step there was a change in the aspect of the path: that which had appeared to be a tree when seen from a distance proving to be only a bush, while a slender reed sometimes looked as tall as a sapling.

CHAPTER XIX.

SMOKE was ascending from all the chimneys, and the people of the village were on their way—some to the river, some to their daily labor, and some to the outpost, as the two sportsmen trudged along the grass-grown path, the

dogs wagging their tails joyfully as they ran on in advance of their masters.

Myriads of gnats filled the air, pursuing the hunters and covering their backs, hands and faces. Olenine kept looking back at the ox-cart and at Marianna urging the oxen on with her switch. A marvelous quiet reigned over the scene. The noises from the village had grown fainter and fainter, and the only sound that now broke the stillness was the snapping of the reeds as the dogs bounded through them or the occasional cry of a bird. Olenine knew that the forest was not a safe place, as there were Abreks in the neighborhood, but he felt no fear. He only felt that almost any other person would be afraid under the same circumstances. With every nerve on the alert, he listened for the slightest sound, kept his rifle in constant readiness, and experienced a sensation that was both agreeable and novel to him. Uncle Jerochka walked in advance of him, pausing to examine each pool and to point out the tracks of each wild animal to Olenine. He talked very little, however, only making an occasional remark to his companion in a whisper. The path they were following had been made by an ox-cart originally, but it had long since become overgrown with grass. Elms and plane-trees bordered so thickly on each side that it was impossible for the eye to penetrate the dense foliage, especially as nearly all the trees were enveloped from top to bottom in luxuriant vines. The richness of this vegetation struck Olenine forcibly at every step, and the lonely forest, the feeling of danger, the old Cossack with his mysterious whispering, the beauty and untutored grace of Marianna, and the distant mountains, all seemed to Olenine a sort of a dream.

"A pheasant!" whispered the old hunter, pulling his cap down over his eyes. "Cover your face; it's a pheasant!"

As he spoke he dropped down upon all fours, and an instant after a report like that of a cannon resounded from

his huge rifle. The pheasant made a sudden movement as if about to take flight, but fell to the ground. As Olenine walked toward his companion he started a second bird, which darted off through the air with the rapidity of lightning. Raising his gun, Olenine took aim and fired. The pheasant fell like a stone, catching in the brambles.

"Bravo!" cried the old hunter, who did not know how to hit a bird on the wing.

They picked up the birds and continued on their way, and Olenine, excited by the novelty of the scene and his own success, did his best to keep up a continuous conversation with his companion.

"Wait a moment," said Uncle Jerochka. "I saw some deer-tracks here yesterday.

They turned into the forest, and after proceeding about three hundred yards, came to a clearing, in which there were several large pools of water. Olenine was about twenty yards behind his companion when the latter paused, stooped down, and began to make mysterious signs to him. Olenine quickened his pace, and on reaching Uncle Jerochka's side, perceived the imprint of human feet.

"Do you see that?" asked the old man.

"Yes. What of it?" responded Olenine, forcing himself to appear calm.

Involuntarily he thought of Cooper's "Pathfinder," and of the Abreks, and noting the old man's mysterious manner, he wondered whether this last was caused by the presence of danger, or merely by a keen love of sport.

"They are my own tracks," remarked Jerochka, complacently.

A short distance further on they came to a spreading pear-tree, beneath which they saw traces of an animal's recent sojourn.

"He has been here this morning," whispered the old hunter. "The nest is still warm."

Suddenly a loud rustling resounded about ten yards

from them. They both started violently and seized their guns, but they could see nothing, though the cracking of the branches continued. A rapid but measured gallop was heard for a moment. The cracking sound grew fainter and fainter, until it gave place to a dull noise that finally died away in the depths of the forest.

Overwhelmed with consternation, Olenine turned from the thicket to the old Cossack. Uncle Jerochka was standing perfectly motionless, with his gun pressed convulsively to his breast. His cap was on the back of his head, his eyes sparkled with unusual brilliancy, and his wide-open mouth disclosed each yellow tooth. He looked like one petrified.

"A stag!" he faltered, at last.

And throwing down his gun, he began to tear his gray beard.

"He was there!" he continued. "He must have come by the path. Fool, idiot! Fool!" he repeated, still tugging at his beard.

It was beginning to grow dark when Olenine reached home, tired and hungry. Dinner was ready. He eat, took a glass with the old hunter, and then went out on the porch. The mountains were looming up grandly in the horizon as the old hunter resumed his interminable tales of the chase, of the Abreks, of his sweethearts, and of his various achievements of former years.

The beautiful Marianna passed and repassed in the courtyard, the vigor and youthful grace of her form no whit concealed by the scanty garment she wore.

CHAPTER XX.

On the following day Olenine repaired alone to the place where they had started the stag. The day was calm and very warm, the sky cloudless. It was barely noon when he reached the stag's haunt, but the dew had dried off

some time before, even in the forest, and a host of gnats settled on Olenine's face, neck and hands. His black dog looked gray, so thickly was he covered with the insects. They bit Olenine through his coat, which had also become of a grayish hue for a like reason, and not knowing how to protect himself from their attacks he said to himself that it would be well nigh impossible to live even at the station during the summer.

He was about to retrace his steps when he remembered that other people did manage to endure it, so he resolved to summon up all his patience and allow himself to be devoured. Strange to say, by noon the experience began to seem almost agreeable to him. He even fancied that if he were not surrounded by this dense crowd of gnats the forest would lose its savage character, and consequently one of its chief attractions.

These myriads of insects were in perfect keeping with the luxuriant vegetation, the rich green foliage, the crowd of beasts and birds that filled the forest, the sultry air, and the tiny rivulets that gleamed here and there; and he finally found a charm in that which had at first appeared intolerable.

After thoroughly exploring the clearing, and finding nothing, he decided to rest there awhile, and gradually there stole over him a feeling of ineffable happiness, a profound love for all mankind, and involuntarily, yielding to a habit of infancy, he made the sign of the cross and murmured a prayer.

Suddenly some such thoughts as these flashed through his mind with marvelous distinctness: "Here, I, Dimitri Olenine, a being surely favored above all others, am lying in the very spot where a magnificent stag was lying only a short time ago—a stag that has never seen the face of man, and in a place no one has ever visited or perhaps even thought of before. Here I am surrounded by trees, both young and old; one of them is almost concealed from

sight by the luxuriance of a climbing vine. Around me circle pheasants, pursuing one another, and suspecting, perhaps, that I have just slain some of their brethren." He picked up the pheasants he had killed, examined them, laid them down again, and wiped his blood-stained hand on the skirt of his coat. "The hungry jackals have perhaps scented their blood already, and are even now lurking around. The gnats buzz merrily above my head and among the leaves, which probably seem to them so many immense islands. There are hundreds, thousands, millions of gnats, all of which have a right to live, and each of them is a thing apart, the possessor of a distinct identity, just as much as I am."

He fancied he could guess what the insects were thinking and saying. "Here, my friends, here is some one we can besiege and devour." And he realized fully that he was not a Russian nobleman, a friend or relative of such and such a person, but simply a living being, like a pheasant, or like one of the gnats hovering around him.

"Like them, and like Jerochka, I shall live for awhile, and then die," he said to himself. "He is right, the grass will grow over me, and that will be the end of it. And what does it matter if it is? It is none the less necessary to have faith and to endeavor to enjoy life. I desire happiness whether I be only an insect or an animal predestined to die, or a man endowed with divine life. In either case I am equally anxious to enjoy life. But what is the surest way to do that? And why have I not been happy up to the present time?"

He reviewed his past life, and it filled him with horror. He realized now his boundless selfishness, and how exacting and unreasonable his demands had been, though he really needed little or nothing. He glanced around him, and his eyes fell upon a transparent leaf, through which the sunlight was streaming brightly, and felt wonderfully happy,

though it would have been impossible for him to state the reason.

"Why am I so happy now?" he said to himself; "and why is it that I feel as if I had never really lived before? How mad I have been! I have gratified my every wish without regard to cost, and have reaped only disgrace and remorse."

A sudden light flashed upon him.

"Happiness, true happiness," he thought, "consists in living for others. Man craves happiness; that is only natural. If he endeavors to secure it by selfish aims, and by the pursuit of wealth, fame, or even love, he may never obtain either of these, and his longings may consequently remain ungratified. Hence it is only these selfish desires that are wrong, not the desire for happiness. What are the only dreams that can be realized in spite of the most adverse circumstances? Love and self-sacrifice."

He sprung up delighted and agitated at the discovery of this truth, and began to wonder whom he could benefit, and to whom he should devote himself. "I need nothing more myself; why should I not devote my life to others?" he thought.

He picked up his gun and quitted the secluded nook with the intention of returning home, and reflecting upon the best available means of doing good. When he reached the clearing the sun had sunk behind the tree-tops, the air had become cooler, and the entire scene had undergone a decided change of aspect. Clouds obscured the sky, and the wind was moaning dismally through the branches. Olenine called his dog, who had started off in pursuit of some animal, and his voice sounded hollow and strange in the solitude. A feeling of fear seized him. The Abreks and the murders of which he had heard recurred to his mind, and he momentarily expected to see an enemy spring out at him from behind some bush or shrub. He thought

of God, and of the life to come as he had not thought before for many a year.

"Is it worth while to think of self when one may die at any moment, and without having done any good to any one?" he asked himself.

He took the path which led, as he supposed, to the village. All thought of sport was forgotten now; he was anxious and worried, and cast terrified glances at each tree and shrub, fearing to encounter death at each step. He wandered on without knowing where he was going for a long time, and at last, reaching a sort of rough canal filled with cold and muddy water, he decided to follow that. Suddenly there was a loud rustling in the reeds behind him; he started violently and raised his gun to his shoulder, but the very next moment he felt ashamed of his fears, for it was only his panting, tired dog that had jumped into the ditch, and was greedily drinking the cold water.

Olenine now followed the dog, persuaded that the animal would know the way homeward; but in spite of the companionship of this faithful friend his surroundings seemed to grow more and more gloomy. The forest became much darker; the wind howled more and more dismally through the trees; great birds started up from their nests, shrieking wildly; vegetation seemed to become less and less luxuriant, and bare, sandy spots covered with the tracks of wild beasts more and more numerous. Olenine counted his pheasants and found that one was missing, though its bloody head was still fast in his belt. Terror seized the young man; he was really afraid, and he began to pray. He feared above all else that he would die without having done any good in the world, and he longed ardently to live —to live to perform some grand act of self-abnegation.

CHAPTER XXI.

LIGHT and hope seemed to suddenly dawn upon Olenine's troubled soul. He heard words uttered in the Russian tongue, and the monotonous flow of the Terek, and a few yards ahead of him he perceived the rapid and turbid waters of the river. Beyond lay the steppes and the mountains, and by the river side stood an outpost tower, and a saddled horse browsing among the rushes. The sun hung like a huge ball of fire against a background of heavy clouds, illumining with its last rays the river, the rushes, the buildings of the outpost, and a group of Cossacks, among them Lukashka, who instantly attracted attention by his proud and fearless bearing.

He had reached a Cossack outpost directly opposite a settlement of friendly Circassians on the other side of the stream. He bowed to the Cossacks and stepped into the quarters, where he was coldly received, partly because he was smoking, and partly because their attention was otherwise engaged just at that moment. A Circassian, a relative of the man who had just been killed, had come in company with a dragoman to offer a ransom for the body, and was now awaiting the arrival of the authorities. This brother of the deceased, a tall, powerful fellow, had the calm majestic mien of a sovereign, in spite of his ragged garments, and strikingly resembled his brother in appearance. He honored no one with so much as a glance, but remained crouching upon his crossed legs, smoking a short pipe, and giving from time to time sundry orders to his companion in a guttural and imperious voice. He was evidently a *djighite*, who had been brought in contact with Russians more than once.

Olenine approached the body; but the brother of the

dead man glanced at him scornfully and gave a brusque order to the dragoman, who hastened to cover the face of the dead. Olenine was struck by the Abrek's austere air, and attempted to ask him where he lived; but without giving him so much as a glance, the Circassian turned away. Astonished at the indifference the man displayed, Olenine attributed it to an ignorance of the Russian language and to natural stupidity, and turned his attention to the Abrek's companion, who acted the part of spy, arbitrator, and dragoman, all at the same time—a swarthy, wide-awake Circassian, with white teeth and sparkling black eyes, who seemed very willing to talk, and who immediately asked for a cigarette.

"There were five brothers," he said, in his broken Russian; "and this is the third that has perished at the hands of the Cossacks. His brother, whom you see here, is a brave man—a very brave man. When Ahmet Khan—that is the name of the deceased—was killed, this brother was hiding in the reeds on the opposite bank and saw the whole affair. He remained in his hiding-place until night, and wanted to kill the old man, but his companions prevented it."

Just then Lukashka came out and sat down beside them.

"To what village do they belong?" asked Olenine.

"Do you know where Suyken is? Their village is in that narrow pass you see over there, about ten miles further on."

"Do you know Guirei Khan?" asked Lukashka, evidently rather proud of this acquaintance. "He is a friend of mine."

"Yes, he is one of my near neighbors."

The chief of the village and the station-master soon made their appearance, accompanied by two Cossacks. The station-master, who was a new arrival, saluted the Cossacks, who did not respond as soldiers usually do by shouting "We wish you good health!" Some of them did not even

return the salute. Several rose, however—Luka was one of them—and straightened themselves up. All this seemed very strange to Olenine. It looked as if these Cossacks were only playing at soldiers. Even these slight formalities were soon abandoned, and the officer began a conversation in Tartar with the dragoman. Then a few lines were written on a slip of paper and handed to the dragoman; he gave the station-master some money in return, and the body was turned over to him.

"Which of you is Luka Gaveilow?" inquired the station-master.

Lukashka removed his cap and stepped forward.

"I have reported the case to the colonel, and asked for the cross for you—for it is too soon to promote you to the rank of corporal. Do you know how to read?"

"No."

"What a fine-looking fellow he is!" said the official in a whispered aside. "To what family of Gaveilows does he belong—to Cheraki Gaveilow's family?"

"He is a nephew."

"I thought so; I thought so."

Luka was radiant with delight as he put on his cap and reseated himself beside Olenine.

The body of the Abrek was placed in a boat by the Cossacks, and as the brother approached the river bank they stepped back, involuntarily giving place to him.

He stamped his foot violently on the ground, and then leaped into the boat. Olenine noticed that he now glanced at the Cossacks for the first time, and that he hastily asked his companion a question. The latter replied by pointing to Lukashka. The Abrek looked at him, then turning slowly, he directed his gaze upon the opposite shore. His features expressed not so much hatred as a cold disdain. He made some remark, too, which Olenine failed to hear.

"What did he say?" he inquired.

"You fight us; but we will crush you!" answered the

interpreter, bursting into a laugh that disclosed all his white teeth as he jumped into the boat.

The brother of the dead man was sitting there, silent and motionless, with his eyes still riveted on the opposite shore. He seemed to despise the Cossacks too thoroughly to feel the slightest curiosity in regard to what was going on around him. The dragoman stood in the stern propelling the boat and talking incessantly. Horses were in readiness on the other side of the river. When they landed they threw the body across a horse, though he capered and pranced wildly at the sight of it; then they mounted and trotted leisurely by the village from which a crowd had run out to see them pass.

The Cossacks were all in the best of spirits, and jokes and laughter resounded on every side. The chief and the station-master went into that officer's quarters to take a drink. Lukashka, whose face was radiant, though he endeavored to maintain a serious air, remained sitting with his elbows resting on his knees.

"What makes you smoke?" he asked, feigning a curiosity he did not feel, merely because he saw that Olenine was not feeling altogether at ease among the Cossacks.

"I am in the habit of it. Why do you ask?"

"If one of us dared to smoke he would catch the devil. Do you see those mountains?" continued Lukashka, pointing to a chain dimly visible in the distance. "They don't look very far off; but you would never reach them. How are you going to find your way home? It is getting dark; but I can show you the way if you wish. Ask the corporal to let me go with you."

"What a handsome fellow!" thought Olenine, admiring the Cossack's gay and frank expression. He remembered Marianna and the kiss at the gate; and the Cossack's ignorance and want of education pained him.

"How terrible!" he thought. "One man kills another and feels as happy and proud as if he had accomplished

some noble feat! Is it possible that nothing tells him that there is no cause for rejoicing, that self-sacrifice is noble and commendable, and not murder?"

"You had better take care and not fall into his clutches, Lukashka," remarked one of the Cossacks who had carried the Abrek's body to the skiff.

Luka looked up.

"Do you mean my godson's?" he asked, referring to the dead Abrek.

"Your godson will never trouble you any more. It is his red-bearded brother I'm talking about."

"He had better pray to get off safe and sound himself," replied Luka, laughing.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Olenine. "If any one killed your brother would you be glad of it?"

The Cossack smiled. He seemed to understand his companion's meaning, but he was evidently far above all such prejudices.

"That is by no means unlikely. They kill some of us occasionally, too."

CHAPTER XXII.

OLENINE, partly to please Lukashka, and partly so as not to be obliged to traverse the forest alone in the darkness, asked the corporal's permission to take the young Cossack with him. He thought that Lukashka would be glad to see Marianna again, and was not sorry to have a pleasant companion himself. He united Lukashka and Marianna in his imagination, and took pleasure in the thought.

"He is in love with Marianna," he thought, "and I might have loved her myself."

A feeling somewhat akin to friendship seemed to have sprung up between the two young men, and they smiled as they looked at each other.

"Which gate are we going to?" inquired Olenine.

"To the middle one. I will go with you as far as the swamp. You'll have nothing to fear after that."

"Do you think I'm afraid? Nonsense! Go back; I'll find my way alone."

"Oh, I've nothing else to do. And why shouldn't you feel afraid? I'm sure that we often do," replied the Cossack, laughing.

"Come with me to my house, then. We'll have a talk and something to drink, and in the morning you can go back."

"Do you think I can find no other place to spend the night? Besides, the corporal told me to come back to-night."

"I heard you singing last evening; and then I saw you—"

"I only do as others do."

"Are you really going to be married soon?"

"My mother wants me to; but I haven't a horse yet."

"Are you in the regular service?"

"Oh, no; I'm preparing for it; but I have no horse, and I don't know how I'm going to get one. That's the reason I can't marry yet."

"How much does a horse cost?"

"I was inquiring the price of one the other day on the other side of the river, and I can't get a good one for less than sixty rubles."

"Would you be willing to act as my orderly? If you will I'll give you a horse."

"Why should you give me a horse?" asked Lukashka, laughing; "I'll get one somehow or other."

"But why won't you be my orderly?" insisted Olenine, pleased at the idea of giving a horse to Lukashka, but somewhat embarrassed, without really understanding why.

"Have you a house of your own in Russia?" inquired the Cossack.

Olenine could not resist the temptation to say that he had several houses.

"And have you horses like ours?"

"I have a hundred, worth three or four hundred rubles apiece, but not like yours."

"Then what possessed you to come here?" asked Lukashka, incredulously. "You certainly couldn't have come of your own free will. Here is where you made a mistake in the road," he added, pointing to a path. "You should have turned to the right instead of to the left."

"I did come of my own free will," replied Olenine. "I wanted to see the country and take part in the campaign."

"I should like to do that. Just hear those jackals."

"Do you feel no remorse for having killed a man?"

"Why should I? Oh! if I could only go on a campaign. There's nothing I desire so much."

"We can go on one together, perhaps. Our company will go on an expedition before the holidays, and possibly some of the native troops will go too."

"But what induced you to come here? You have your house and your horses, and probably your serfs. If I had been in your place, I should have stayed in Russia and enjoyed myself. What is your rank?"

"I am color-bearer, and shall soon be an officer."

It was considerably after nightfall when they neared the station. They were not yet out of the forest; the wind was still moaning and sighing through the trees; the jackals seemed to be howling and laughing and weeping close beside them, but they could hear in the distance the voices of women and the barking of dogs, and could distinguish the shape of the houses and see the lights. Olenine felt that this village was really his home, and that he would never be as happy anywhere else. He felt amicably disposed toward every one, and especially toward Lukashka. After he reached the cottage he had the horse he bought at Groz-

noi brought out—not the one he rode himself, but a good animal, though very young—and, to the intense astonishment of Lukashka, made him a present of it then and there.

"Why do you give me a horse?" asked Lukashka. "I have never done you any service."

"The animal cost me very little," replied Olenine. "Take it; some time you can give me something in return."

"But what can I give you? A horse costs a good deal of money."

"Take it, take it. If you don't I shall regard it as an insult. Vania, hand the horse over to him."

Lukashka took the bridle.

"Well, then, I thank you a thousand times. I never dreamed of such a thing."

Olenine was as happy as a child.

"Tie her. She's a good animal. I bought her at Groznoi. Now bring us some wine, Vania."

When the wine was brought in, Lukashka seated himself and took a glass.

"With God's help I will repay you," he said, draining his glass. "What is your name?"

"Dimitri Andreitch."

"Well, Dimitri Andreitch, may Heaven preserve you! We shall be good friends, I am sure. Come and see me; we are not rich, but we have enough to entertain our friends. I will tell my mother to bring you some cheese and some grapes, if you will accept them. Come, too, to the outpost. You will find me at your service. I will take you to the hunting grounds on the other side of the river if you wish. What a splendid wild boar I killed the other day. What a pity I divided it with the other Cossacks. If I had only known, I would have brought part of it to you."

"Thank you, thank you. You are very kind. Only

don't harness the horse to a cart; he has never been in the traces."

"Harness a horse to a cart! Of course not. This is what I will do," continued Luka, lowering his voice, "I will take you to the home of my friend, Guirei-Khan. Will you go with me?"

"Yes, we will go together."

Lukashka seemed perfectly at ease. Indeed, his calmness and the familiarity of his manner surprised and even shocked Olenine a little. They talked a long time, and it was late when he rose, shook hands with his host and went away.

Olenine looked out the window to see what the Cossack was going to do. Lukashka led the horse out of the courtyard, mounted it with cat-like agility, and started the animal at full speed down the street. Olenine had fancied that he would inform Marianna of his good fortune without delay, but though he did not, Olenine felt just as happy as before. In his childish joy he could not refrain from telling Vania of the present he had just made, and from explaining his new theory in regard to happiness. This last did not meet with Vania's approval, however. He declared in French that there was no money in it, or, in other words, that it was all nonsense.

Lukashka rode home, jumped from his horse, and asked his mother to take the animal to pasture, as he must return to the outpost that night. The dumb girl took charge of the horse, and explained by signs that she knew who had made her brother a present of it, and that she bowed down before him. The old mother shook her head on hearing her son's story. She felt sure that he had stolen the horse, so she ordered the dumb girl to be sure and take it to pasture before daybreak.

As Lukashka wended his way back to the outpost he reflected upon Olenine's conduct. He did not consider the horse a valuable one, still it was worth at least forty rubles,

and he was very well satisfied with it. But he could not conceive why such a gift had been presented to him, and he felt no gratitude whatever. On the contrary, a thousand suspicions most unflattering to the color-bearer flitted through his mind. What the Russian's motive was he could not imagine, but he did not believe that any stranger would make him a present worth forty rubles without some other reason than natural goodness of heart. "If he had been drunk I could understand it," he thought, "but he was perfectly sober, so he must want to make use of me in carrying out some evil design. But pshaw! the animal is mine, and I'll be on my guard. I'm no fool, and we'll see who comes out ahead in the end."

These suspicions once aroused, Lukashka began to entertain a positively unfriendly feeling toward Olenine. He did not tell any one how he came into possession of the horse. He told some of his acquaintances that he had bought it; to the questions of others he replied in an evasive manner. The truth soon became known in the village, however, and his mother, Marianna, Ilea Vassilitch and others did not know what to think, but notwithstanding their suspicions, the affair inspired them with a profound respect for Olenine's wealth.

"Do you know that the color-bearer has given Lukashka a horse worth fifty rubles?" asked one. "How rich he must be!"

"I heard so," replied another, with a knowing air. "The stranger must expect Luka to render him some important service. What a lucky fellow Lukashka is!"

"What a lunatic the color-bearer must be!" exclaimed a third. "Heaven grant that he doesn't try to set fire to our houses."

CHAPTER XXIII.

For awhile after this Olenine's life went on quietly and monotonously. Of his superior officers and his comrades he saw but little. The position of a color-bearer of wealth in the Caucasus is very pleasant, for he is not obliged to drill or perform service of any kind. After the last campaign his name had been sent up for promotion, but at the present time his position was a sinecure. The officers regarded him as an aristocrat and manifested a certain reserve toward him, and he did not care for their amusements, which consisted principally of card parties. An officer's life under such circumstances is too well known to require description; each one of them drinks beer, plays cards, and calculates his chances of decorations and promotion. At the stations he drinks with his post, treats the girls to honey or other dainties, flirts with the Cossack women, falls in love with them, and sometimes marries them. Olenine had always lived to suit his own fancy, and he had an intense horror of beaten grooves, so here, as elsewhere, he was a law unto himself.

Going to bed at an early hour, he very naturally fell into the habit of waking about daybreak, and after taking a cup of tea on his little porch, and sufficiently admiring the mountains, the lovely morning and Marianna, he generally slipped on an old coat and a pair of buckskin sandals, stuck his dagger in his belt, took his gun and a small bag with his lunch and some tobacco, called his dog, and started for the forest. He usually returned about seven o'clock in the evening, tired and half starved, with five or six pheasants in his belt, and without having touched either lunch or cigars. If the thoughts that lay dormant in his brain could have been counted like the cigarettes in his lunch-

bag one would have discovered that their number, too, was intact. He returned home fresh and strong mentally and perfectly contented. It would have been impossible for him to tell what he had been thinking about during the day. Sometimes he fancied himself a Cossack, working in the garden with his wife; sometimes an Abrek, roaming over the mountains; sometimes a wild boar, running away from himself.

His evenings were usually spent in Uncle Jerochka's company. Olenine drank with him, though sparingly, and they chatted pleasantly, and usually separated well satisfied with their evening. The next day brought another hunting expedition, the same wholesome fatigue, the same long conversation with the old hunter, and likewise the same perfect contentment. On fête days and Sundays he did not leave the house, and his principal occupation then was watching Marianna, whose every movement was plainly visible from his windows and porch. He fancied he liked to gaze at her as he gazed at the sky or mountains, and did not think for an instant of any more intimate relations with her. He felt sure that no such feeling could exist between her and himself as existed between her and Lukashka. He said to himself that if he followed the examples of his comrades in such matters he should only exchange his present quiet contentment for a life of uneasiness, disenchantment and remorse. Above all, he had a feeling of wholesome respect for Marianna, and would not have trifled with her for worlds.

One day during the summer Olenine concluded to remain at home, and very unexpectedly one of his Moscow acquaintances dropped down, seemingly from the clouds.

"My dear fellow, my dear fellow, how delighted I was to learn that you were here!" exclaimed his visitor in Muscovite French.

"They spoke of an Olenine. 'What Olenine?' I asked.

I was enchanted that fate had brought us together again. Well, how are you—and how do you happen to be here?"

Then Prince Beletsky told his own story. He was to be connected with this regiment awhile, but the commander-in-chief wanted him to act as his aid-de-camp, and he was to join him after the next campaign, though he was not very particular about it.

"Having made up my mind to serve in this hole, I mean to win a cross or secure a transfer into the Guards. This is absolutely necessary, not on my own account, but on account of my family and friends. The prince treated me most generously—he is a splendid fellow," continued Beletsky, without once pausing to take breath. "I shall receive the Cross of St. Anne after the expedition, and this isn't such a bad place after all. How handsome the women are! Our captain—you know Sartow—a good fellow, but frightfully stupid, told me that you led a most secluded life, associating with no one. I don't wonder you hold yourself aloof from the officers. In fact, I'm glad of it; I shall see all the more of you. I am staying at the corporal's. What a lovely daughter he's got! Oustinka! By Jove! she's a beauty."

Then followed a flood of French and Russian words—an echo from the gay world that Olenine had left as he supposed forever. People in general considered Beletsky a charming fellow, and he probably was, but Olenine thought him a terrible bore in spite of his frank, handsome face. He brought with him the unwholesome atmosphere from which Olenine had fled; and what vexed him most was that he had not courage to reject these overtures of friendship, thus proving that the society in which he had formerly moved still preserved an incontestable claim upon him. He was angry with Beletsky and with himself; nevertheless he found himself unconsciously introducing French phrases into the conversation and feigning an interest in the commander-in-chief and sundry Moscow acquaintances. But

though he treated Beletsky in a friendly way and invited him to call often, and promised to return his visit soon, he did not go, though Vania thoroughly approved of the newcomer, and declared him a perfect gentleman.

Beletsky immediately fell into the mode of life common to all wealthy young officers. At the end of a month one would have supposed he had spent his life in the Caucasus. He got the old men drunk, gave entertainments, spent his evenings at the houses of the Cossack girls, and boasted of his conquests. The Cossacks, thinking it only natural that a young man should be fond of women and of wine, took a great fancy to him, and infinitely preferred him to Olenine, who seemed to them a living enigma.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was five o'clock in the morning; Vania was boiling the tea-kettle on the porch, and Olenine had gone to the Terek to give his horse a bath in the river. Old Oulita was in her kitchen; her daughter had not finished milking the buffalo cow. "Stand still, you beast!" she was saying, and following the words came the regular flow of milk into the pail.

The ring of a horse's hoofs resounded near the house, and Olenine, mounted on his handsome gray horse, still wet from the bath, approached the gate. Marianna put out her head, swathed in a red handkerchief, then hastily withdrew it. Olenine had on a red silk shirt, a white Cossack coat belted about the waist, and a tall cap. He sat rather stiffly on his well-fed horse, and thought himself a true mountaineer in appearance; but in this he was greatly mistaken, for the practiced eye of the Cossack instantly detected the soldier beneath this disguise. Seeing the young girl's head, he leaped lightly over the hedge, cutting the air with his whip.

"Is tea ready, Vania?" he cried, gayly, but without

glancing toward the stable. He hoped that the lovely face of Marianna would reappear, but he dared not turn toward her himself.

He entered his cottage, but only to emerge from it a moment afterward with his book and pipe. He did not intend to go out again until after dinner, but to devote the day to writing some long-deferred letters, yet he felt unwilling to leave the porch, the house seemed so like a prison. The old woman finished making her fire; the daughter drove the cattle to pasture, and Olenine read on, though without understanding a word of the book that lay open before him, for he was continually glancing up from it to watch the young and blooming girl whose every movement was full of a wild and untutored grace.

It was a real pleasure to see the ease and grace with which she stooped in the performance of her rough task of collecting the refuse around the fence. Her loose pink gown covered her shoulders closely, but when she straightened herself up the perfect contour of her bosom and slender limbs was plainly visible through the thin garment. Her slender feet, incased in shabby red slippers, retained their shapeliness of form unimpaired as she walked, her strong arms plied the rake vigorously, one might almost have said angrily, and she cast an occasional glance at Olenine from beneath her heavy brows, a glance in which her pleasure at being admired and a conviction of her beauty were quite apparent.

"Have you been up long, Olenine?" asked Beletsky, entering the court-yard in full uniform.

"Why, Beletsky, how do you happen to be abroad at this early hour?"

"I was turned out of house and home. There is to be a party at our house to-night. You're coming, aren't you, Marianna?" he shouted to the young girl.

Olenine was astonished that his friend should dare to address the girl so familiarly. Marianna pretended not to

have heard the question, however, and shouldering her rake retreated to the house.

"How shy she is this morning," cried Beletsky, gayly, as he mounted the steps. "It must be your presence that makes her so."

"Who is going to give the party? Who turned you out of doors?"

"Oustinka, my landlady's daughter. You are invited. We're going to have a fine time; that is to say, we're going to have some cake and a crowd of girls."

"But how are we to amuse ourselves?"

Beletsky smiled mischievously, winked and motioned with his head toward the cottage, in which Marianna had just taken refuge.

Olenine shrugged his shoulders and blushed deeply.

"You must be out of your senses!" he exclaimed, angrily.

"Nonsense! You needn't try to fool me."

Olenine frowned darkly. Beletsky noticed it, and smiled with an insinuating air.

"And why not?" he asked. "You live in the same house almost, and she's a fine girl—a regular beauty, and no mistake."

"Yes, I have never seen her equal in beauty."

"Then what's your objection?" asked Beletsky, entirely in the dark.

"It may seem strange to you," replied Olenine, "but I don't see why I should not tell you the truth. Since I have been living here I have not so much as spoken to a woman, and I've got on very comfortably, I assure you. Besides, what is there in common between these women and ourselves? With Jerochka, it is quite another thing. A love of hunting draws us together."

"Well, I call that a good joke. What was there in common between Madame Amalie and me, I should like to know? If you said that these women were not very clean

I should admit the truth of your statement; but when you're among Romans, you must do as Romans do."

"I have never had any dealings with your Madame Amalie," replied Olenine. "One can't respect a person like that, but I do respect this girl."

"Respect her as much as you please; I'm sure no one has any desire to prevent it."

Olenine took no notice of the jest. He was evidently anxious to finish what he had to say on the subject.

"I know that I am an exception to the general rule," he continued, though not without some embarrassment. "I am so constituted that I do not feel tempted to violate my principles in these matters, and I could hardly act otherwise than I do. I should not be as happy as I am now if I followed your example."

Beletsky lifted his eyebrows with an incredulous air.

"Never mind; come over to-night all the same," he replied. "Marianka will be there, and you can make her acquaintance. Come, I beg of you. If you don't enjoy yourself you can leave early. Won't you come?"

"I would, but to tell the truth I'm afraid of being led astray."

"Ha, ha!" cried Beletsky, evidently thinking this a good joke. "Come, I'll take care of you. Promise me, now."

"Perhaps I will."

"Think of it; here you are, surrounded by lovely women —the loveliest women in the world, I do believe—and yet you lead the life of a monk. How absurd not to accept the blessings the gods provide, and be thankful. Have you heard that our company is to be sent to Vozdvijensky?"

"That is not at all probable," said Olenine. "I heard it was Company Eight that was to go."

"No; I've received a letter from the aid-de-camp, and he writes that the prince himself will take part in the cam-

paign. I shall be glad to go. I'm beginning to get tired of this life."

"They say the expedition will start soon."

"I don't know anything about that, but I do know that K—— received the Cross of St. Anne for the last campaign. He expected to be made a colonel, and he must be terribly disappointed," said Beletsky, laughing.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE invitation Olenine had received troubled him not a little. He wanted to accept it, but he was alarmed at the thought of the possible consequences. He would meet no old women and aged hunters there, but only young girls. What would the consequences be? How should he act? What should he say? What possible congeniality could there be between him and these young Cossack girls?

He trembled at the mere thought of finding himself in the same room with Marianna, and of talking with her, though this seemed almost an impossibility when he remembered her majestic manner. Still, Beletsky had declared that nothing could be more simple.

"I should really like to know how Beletsky will behave toward Marianna?" he said to himself; "but no, I had better not go."

He continued to debate the question in his own mind, but finally concluding that he was bound to some extent by the partial promise he had given, he started out without having come to any final decision, but on reaching Beletsky's lodgings he entered.

The cottage was similar to that occupied by Olenine. It stood upon piles and contained only two rooms. In one there was quite an imposing display of feather beds, rugs and coverlets. The walls were adorned with copper basins and weapons of divers kinds, and the space under the benches was filled with gourds and water-melons. There

was an enormous stove in the adjoining room, as well as several tables and benches. It was in this room that Beletsky had placed his camp-bed, trunks, toilet articles and pictures. A silk dressing-gown was lying on the bench. Beletsky, who was a handsome, wholesome looking fellow, was lying on the bed in his shirt sleeves, reading the "Three Musketeers."

He sprung up instantly.

"I am glad you came! See how nicely I am fixed. Everybody is terribly busy yet. Guess what the cake is made of? Of pork and raisins. They haven't got things quite ready yet. See what an exciting time they are having."

Glancing out of the window one could see that an extraordinary state of excitement prevailed in the landlady's cottage, and a number of girls were continually running in and out.

"Will you be ready soon?" cried Beletsky.

"In a minute. Are you so dreadfully hungry that you can't wait any longer?"

Oustinka, plump and rosy, with her sleeves rolled high above her dimpled elbows, ran into Beletsky's apartments a few minutes afterward to borrow some plates.

"Stop, you'll make me break the dishes," she cried shrilly, as Beletsky tried to hug her as she passed. "You ought to come and help us," she said laughingly to Olenine. "Did you bring us any goodies?"

"Has Marianka come?" inquired Beletsky.

"Yes, indeed. She brought us a splendid pie."

"Do you know that if Oustinka were dressed differently, and would tidy herself up a little, she would put all our Russian beauties to shame? Did you ever see that Cossack woman, Madame B——? She married a colonel, and what wonderful dignity of manner she has! Where she got it I can't imagine."

"I never saw her, but it seems to me that nothing could be more beautiful than the national costume."

"I can adapt myself to any mode of life fortunately," said Beletsky, cheerfully. "I think I'll run over and see what the girls are doing."

And throwing on his dressing-gown, he darted out of the room.

"I'll leave you to attend to the dessert," he cried, as he disappeared.

Olenine sent his orderly out to purchase some gingerbread and honey. As he handed him the money his heart revolted. It seemed to him that he was bribing some one, and he could hardly answer the soldier when he inquired what kind of cakes he should buy, and how many.

"Buy whatever you think proper," he replied.

"Am I to spend all the money—all of it? Mint cakes are the dearest. They cost sixty kopecks a pound."

"Yes, spend all of it—all of it," answered Olenine.

He seated himself by the window, and was surprised to find that his heart was throbbing wildly.

He heard the cries and laughing exclamations excited by Beletsky's unexpected appearance among the girls, and in a few moments saw his friend come flying down the steps, followed by peals of laughter.

"They drove me out," he exclaimed.

A moment later Oustinka entered and solemnly invited the young men to the feast, declaring that everything was now in readiness.

When they reached the scene of the festivities Oustinka was giving the finishing touches to the feather beds ranged along the wall. On the table was a cloth that was much too small. A pitcher of wine and a dried fish occupied the place of honor in the center of the board. The odor of the pie and of raisins was very perceptible. The young girls, in richly embroidered jackets, and without the traditional

handkerchief, were huddled behind the stove, whispering and giggling.

Olenine instantly recognized Marianna in the group of girls, who were all pretty, without exception. He felt ill at ease, however, and decided to imitate Beletsky. That young gentleman gravely approached the table, poured out a glass of wine with the utmost assurance, and invited all present to join him in drinking to the health of their hostess. Oustinka declared that girls did not take wine.

"We could if we had some honey," cried a voice from the group.

The old soldier, who had just returned from his foraging expedition, was summoned. It was hard to say whether the furtive glance with which he surveyed the company was one of envy or contempt. He handed over the dainties, and was about to explain about the price and the change, when Beletsky unceremoniously ordered him out.

After mixing the honey with the wine, which had already been poured into the glasses, Beletsky rather ostentatiously placed three large cakes of ginger-bread on the table, dragged the girls out from their retreat by main force, and seated them at the table.

Olenine could not but notice that Marianna seized two pieces of ginger-bread in her little sunburned hand, and that she did not know what to do with them. The conversation was constrained, in spite of the young men's attempts to entertain and enliven the company. Olenine was embarrassed, and racked his brain to find something to say. He felt that he was an object of curiosity, and that the girls were secretly laughing at him. He blushed, and somehow fancied that Marianna felt much less at ease than any of the others.

"They will probably expect us to give them some money," he thought. "How are we to do it? I wish it were over, and we could get away."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WHAT! is it possible that you don't know your lodger?" asked Beletsky, turning to Marianna.

"How should I know him when he never comes to see us?" replied Marianna, with a glance at Olenine.

Olenine, frightened, blushing, and at a loss what to say, stammered out:

"I'm afraid of your mother. She received me with such a torrent of abuse the first time I presented myself that I've never dared to repeat the visit."

Marianna burst into a hearty laugh.

"So you've been afraid to come, have you?" she said, looking at him, and then turning away.

It was the first time that Olenine had ever had a good look at the young girl's face, for until now he had seen it shrouded to the eyes in a handkerchief. There could be no doubt that she was the handsomest girl in the village. Oustinka was pretty, fresh and rosy. She had mischievous brown eyes, smiling red lips, and was always talking and laughing; but Marianna was something more than a pretty girl—she was a beauty. Her features would have seemed too marked and too large, perhaps, had it not been for her tall, graceful form, superbly developed bust and shoulders, and above all the tender yet rather severe expression of her almond-shaped black eyes, fringed with long, curling lashes, and the caressing smile that curved her lips. She did not smile often, but her smile never failed to charm. She was the very personification of youth and health. The other girls were pretty, but she far surpassed them all, but they and Beletsky and the old soldier who had bought the cake all involuntarily turned to Marianna; and when one talked to the young girls it was always Marianna that one

addressed. She looked like a proud, happy young queen, surrounded by her subjects.

Beletsky spared no pains to make the evening pass pleasantly. He jested familiarly with the girls, and expatiated to Olenine in French upon Marianka's beauty, calling her his sweetheart and urging his friend to follow his example. Olenine became more and more uncomfortable, and was endeavoring to devise some excuse for leaving when Beletsky declared that Oustinka must drink a glass of wine with them, and kiss them in honor of her birthday.

She finally consented, on condition that the young men put some money on her plate, according to the custom at weddings.

"What foul fiend induced me to come to this cursed place?" thought Olenine, rising to go; but Beletsky seized him by the arm, and asked him where he was going.

"After some tobacco," he replied, curtly.

"Don't go; I've got some money," whispered Beletsky.

"I can't leave, for I too must pay something," thought Olenine, enraged at himself for his own awkwardness.

"Why can't I do as Beletsky does?" he said to himself. "Of course I ought not to have come at all, but having come, it's not worth while to spoil the pleasure of others, so let us drink and be merry in true Cossack fashion."

And picking up a huge wooden mug that held at least eight glasses, he filled it with wine and drained it almost at a draught. The girls looked at him with astonishment, and even alarm. It seemed strange and even improper to them. Oustinka poured out another glass for each of the young men, and kissed them both heartily.

"Now we'll have some fun!" she exclaimed, rattling the four rubles they had placed on her plate.

"It's your turn now, Marianna, to give us some wine and a kiss!" cried Beletsky, seizing the girl by the arm.

"You'll have to wait for the kiss," she cried, gayly, shaking her fist at him.

"One can surely kiss one's grandfather without paying for the privilege!" exclaimed one of the girls.

"Who is it that's so witty?" cried Beletsky, kissing Marianna in spite of her struggles.

"Now give us some wine, or at least offer some to your lodger," he remarked, gayly.

As he spoke, he took the girl by the hand and seated her on the bench beside Olenine.

"How beautiful she is!" he remarked, turning her head so Olenine could see her profile.

Marianna allowed him to do so with a proud smile, and gave Olenine a long look out of her beautiful eyes.

"She's a superb creature," repeated Beletsky.

"Am I beautiful?" the eyes of the young girl seemed to ask.

Olenine, scarcely realizing what he was doing, passed his arm around Marianna's waist, and was about to kiss her when she freed herself with a sudden jerk, nearly overturning both Beletsky and the table, and ran behind the stove. Loud exclamations and laughter resounded on every side. Beletsky suddenly whispered something to the girls, and they all darted out of the room after him, locking the door behind them.

"Why do you kiss Beletsky, but refuse to kiss me?" asked Olenine.

"I don't want to, that is all," she replied with a slight pout. "He's only grandfather, you know," she added, laughing; then approaching the door, she began to shake it and call out: "What did you lock the door for, you torments?"

"Let them stay where they are; we don't want them," said Olenine, springing toward her.

She frowned and motioned him back with a haughty gesture. Indeed, she was so majestically beautiful that Olenine felt ashamed of himself, and began to rap and shake the door in his turn.

"I say, Beletsky, what do you mean by this foolishness?" he cried. "Open the door, open the door, I say!"

Marianna began to laugh her frank, joyous laugh.

"What! are you afraid of me?" she cried.

"You may prove as dangerous as your mother."

"You ought to spend more time with Jerochka. That will perhaps make you more fond of the girls."

Her face was close to his, and she smiled mischievously.

Olenine did not know what to say.

"What if I should come to see you?" he asked, hastily.

"That would be quite another thing," she replied, shaking her head.

Just then Beletsky threw open the door, and Marianna, springing toward Olenine, tried to push him aside.

"My ideas about self-denial and love and self-sacrifice are all nonsense! Happiness is the only thing that is real, after all; and the man who enjoys himself most is the wisest man!" These thoughts darted through Olenine's brain with the rapidity of lightning; and seizing Marianna with a violence of which he was scarcely conscious, he kissed her passionately on cheek and brow. She evinced no anger, however, but burst into a laugh and ran off to rejoin her companions.

This ended the little entertainment, for just then Oustinka's mother returned unexpectedly, and after scolding the girls roundly, sent them all home.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"YES," thought Olenine, as he wended his way homeward, "if I yielded to my inclinations, I should fall madly in love with that Cossack girl."

He went to bed with this thought uppermost in his mind, though he was all the while saying to himself that this fancy would soon die a natural death and that he would then resume his old life.

He was mistaken in this, however. His relations with Marianna had undergone a change; the barrier between them had been swept away, and Olenine spoke to the girl whenever he met her.

The cornet, after receiving the first month's rent, felt assured of Olenine's wealth and generosity, and invited him to his house; and as Marianna's mother now treated him quite civilly, he fell into the habit of spending his evenings there after Oustinka's little party. There was no apparent change in his manner of life, but the wildest confusion reigned in his soul. He spent his days in the forest, returning about twilight, and then repairing to his landlord's cottage, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with Jerochka. The family had become so accustomed to seeing him there that his absence rather surprised them. He paid liberally for the wine he drank, and was very quiet and unobtrusive in manner. Vania usually brought over his tea, which he sipped in a corner of the room near the stove. The old woman went on with her work, apparently unconscious of his presence. Sometimes he talked with his host or with the neighbors about Russia; sometimes he took a book and read. Marianna usually sat curled up in front of the stove or in a corner of the room. She never took any part in the conversation; but Olenine could see her eyes following his every movement, could hear the cracking of the sunflower seeds she was continually crunching, and knew that she was listening to him attentively; and when, on glancing up from his book, he saw the fire blazing in her eyes, words failed him, and he could only gaze at her in silence. In the presence of a third party she was always pleasant and civil to him; but as soon as they were left alone she became positively rude. Still he asked nothing and expected nothing; the presence of this young girl was only becoming more and more necessary to him.

His past was well-nigh forgotten now; he never thought for an instant of any future not connected with his present

existence. He was astonished at the rather commiserating tone of letters received from friends who seemed to fancy his existence a most forlorn and wretched one, while he sincerely pitied all who were not leading a life like his own. He persuaded himself that he should never repent of having broken away from his former life. He had felt happy even during his campaigns; but here, under Jerochka's protecting wing, and in the shadow of the primeval forest, he realized all the hollowness of his former life, which now seemed to him unutterably wretched and absurd. Every day he felt that he was becoming more and more of a man, and less of a slave. The Caucasus had not equaled his expectations in some respects, and differed widely from the descriptions he had read of it in romances. "There are no great heroes or terrible villains here," he thought. "Men merely live here in strict accordance with the laws of nature. They increase and multiply, they fight, eat, drink, enjoy life, and die conscious of no laws save those which nature also imposes upon the sunlight, upon vegetation, and upon animals. There are no other laws."

These men seemed to him far better, freer, and more energetic than himself. When he compared himself with them he was filled with shame. Sometimes he even thought of severing all connection with the past, of joining the Cossacks, purchasing a cottage and some cattle, and marrying a Cossack girl, though not Marianna—he relinquished her to Lukashka—of living with Jerochka, and of going hunting and fishing with him, as well as on expeditions with the Cossacks.

Why should he hesitate? What was he waiting for? He felt ashamed of his cowardice. "Why should I be ashamed to lead a sensible life?" he thought. "What is the harm in wishing to become a Cossack, to live in accordance with the laws of nature, to injure no one, but, on the contrary, do good to others? Certainly that is better than the

dreams of former years, when I looked forward to becoming a minister or the commander of a regiment!"

But an inward voice whispered to him to wait, that there was no haste. He vaguely felt that Jerochka's mode of life would not content him; that there was another and very different kind of happiness known as devotion and self-sacrifice. He had never ceased to rejoice at what he had done for Lukashka, and he tried hard to find some other opportunity for self-sacrifice, though without success. Sometimes he forgot this means of happiness and tried to live like Jerochka; but he soon thought better of it and again began to cherish more lofty and ennobling aspirations.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SHORTLY before the vintage Lukashka rode into the village, looking handsomer than ever.

"When is the wedding to be?" inquired Olenine, who chanced to meet him.

Lukashka took no notice of the question, however.

"I swapped your horse on the other side of the river," he remarked. "This is a genuine Kabarda. I'm a pretty good judge of horseflesh, I think."

The two young men examined the new horse together. It was a remarkably handsome animal—a dark bay, with a lustrous coat, and a long silky mane and tail. His hoofs, eyes and teeth were perfect, and attested to the purity of his lineage. Olenine went into raptures over him; he had not seen his equal in the Caucasus.

"And his gait!" exclaimed Lukashka. "You should see his action; besides he's the most intelligent animal I ever saw!"

"Did you have to give much to boot?" inquired Olenine.

"I don't know. A friend got him for me," replied Lukashka, smiling.

"He's a splendid animal. What will you take for him?" inquired Olenine.

"I've been offered one hundred and fifty rubles for him; but I'll let you have him for nothing. Say the word and he is yours."

"Not for the world."

"Then take this dagger I brought for you. I found it on the other side of the river."

"Thanks."

"My mother will soon bring you the grapes I promised you."

"It is hardly worth while. We'll square our accounts some day. I'm not going to offer you anything for the dagger."

"Certainly not; we are friends, you know. Guirei-Khan took me to his home and told me to help myself to anything I wanted, so I chose the dagger. It is one of our customs, you know."

They went into the cottage and took a glass of wine together.

"Are you going to remain long?" asked Olenine.

"No, I only came to say good-bye. I am going across the Terek for awhile. My friend Nazarka is going with me."

"When is the wedding to come off?"

"I shall return soon for the betrothal and then rejoin my comrades."

"What! you are not going to see your betrothed before you leave?"

"No. Why should I? When you start out on the campaign, inquire at the *sotnia* for Lukashka the Broad. What crowds of wild boars there are over there! I killed two, not long ago, and I will show you the place."

Lukashka sprung into the saddle, and without even passing Marianna's house, went prancing down the street to the corner, where Nazarka was awaiting him.

"Shall we go over there?" asked Nazarka, pointing to Yamka's establishment.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea. Take my horse over, will you; and if I'm late give him some hay. I'll be at the outpost before daybreak."

"Has the color-bearer made you another present?"

"No, I was glad to get off with giving him a dagger, for he wanted the horse," said Lukashka, dismounting and handing the bridle to Nazarka.

He ran back, slipped by Olenine's window unperceived, and approached the cornet's cottage. It was very dark now, and Marianna was combing her hair for the night.

"It is I, Lukashka," whispered the Cossack.

The girl's rather stern and indifferent face brightened as she heard the call, and opening the window she leaned out, frightened but happy.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Let me come in for a moment."

As he spoke he took her face in his two hands and kissed her.

"Yes, let me in; I want to talk with you a minute."

"Why do you talk such nonsense? I shall do nothing of the kind. Are you going to be away long?"

"Who are you talking to, Marianna?" cried her mother's voice.

"To Lukashka. He wants to see father."

"Tell him to come in."

"He has gone now. He was in a great hurry."

Lukashka beat a heasty retreat to Yamka's, bending almost double so as not to be seen when he passed the windows. No one saw him but Olenine.

There he took several glasses of wine in company with Nazarka, after which both left the village. The night was mild and serene. They rode on in silence; the ring of their horses' hoofs being the only sound that broke the stillness of the night. At last Lukashka began to sing the song of

the Cossack Mingal; but at the end of the first verse he stopped, and turning to Nazarka, said:

"She wouldn't let me in."

"I was sure she wouldn't," replied Nazarka. "Yamka told me to-night that the color-bearer almost lives there, and that Jerochka boasts of getting a rifle for his services in the matter.

"The old scoundrel lies!" cried Lukashka, angrily. "She isn't that kind of a girl. I'll break the old devil's ribs for him!" and he again began his favorite song.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE betrothal took place. Lukashka came to the village, but did not call on Olenine, and the latter declined his landlord's invitation to witness the ceremony. He was more depressed in spirits than he had been since his arrival at the station.

In the evening he saw Lukashka pass in gala dress, accompanied by his mother, on their way to the cornet's house. The coolness with which Lukashka treated him annoyed Olenine, and he shut himself up in his room and occupied himself with his journal.

"I have meditated a great deal, and changed a great deal during the last few months," he wrote; "and have gone back now to my A B C's. To be loved, the person himself must love with entire unselfishness, love everybody, spread his toils on every side, and love all who are caught in them. It is in this way I have caught in my net Vania, Uncle Jerochka, Lukashka and Marianka."

Just as Olenine finished writing these words Uncle Jerochka entered. He was in the best possible spirits. Several days before Olenine had found him in his courtyard, knife in hand, skinning a wild boar. He looked proud and happy; his dogs, among them his favorite, Lion, were lying around watching him and wagging their

tails. Some little boys were peeping over the fence at him with an air of profound respect, not mocking him according to their custom. His neighbors, who usually troubled themselves very little about him, spoke to him politely and brought him, one a jug of wine, another a pot of curds or a loaf of bread. The next morning Jerochka, all spattered with blood, sat enthroned in his kitchen, bartering boar's meat for wine or money. His face seemed to say: "God has granted me good luck at last." After that he began to drink, and drank four days without stopping. At the betrothal he had again drank heavily, and he was considerably the worse for liquor when he entered Olenine's house. His face was a fiery red, and his hair disheveled, but he was gorgeous to behold, in a new coat elaborately trimmed with braid, and had in his hand a *balalaïkal** he had borrowed on the other side of the river. He had promised to give Olenine an exhibition of his skill on this instrument some time before, and was now in the very humor for it. Seeing that Olenine was engaged in writing, his face suddenly clouded, and he threw himself down on the floor, that being his favorite seat when he was intoxicated. Olenine glanced up at him, ordered some wine brought in, and then went on with his writing. Uncle Jerochka soon became tired of drinking alone, and wanted to talk.

"I've been to the betrothal?" he remarked. "What a set of idiots those people are! I soon got tired of them, and came over to see you."

"Where did you get your *balalaïkal?*" inquired Olenine, without pausing in his writing.

"I was on the other side of the river a day or two ago, and picked it up over there. I'm a capital performer on the instrument, and can play you anything you want—a Tartar, Cossack or soldier's song, just as you prefer."

* A rough kind of guitar with three strings.

Olenine glanced up with a smile, though he did not stop writing.

The smile encouraged the old man, however.

"Put that aside now, father, put that aside," he exclaimed, peremptorily. "What if some one has been troubling you. I wouldn't bother myself about it. It's of no consequence."

For he did not suppose for an instant that a person would write for any other object than to get the better of some one.

Olenine burst into a hearty laugh, and Uncle Jerochka followed his example. He then jumped up and began to display his skill by humming some snatches from Russian and Tartar songs, and accompanying himself on the *balalaïkal.*

"What's the use of writing, my good fellow. Listen, instead, to what I am going to sing to you," he exclaimed. "After you're dead, you won't have a chance to hear any more songs, so you'd better enjoy yourself while you can."

He first sung an air of his own composition; then a song which the sergeant had taught him, and which ran as follows:

"On Monday I fell in love,
On Tuesday suffered martyrdom,
On Wednesday avowed my passion,
All Thursday longed for an answer,
And on Friday I received it.
She told me there was no hope for me,
So all Saturday I planned to end my life,
But I changed my mind on Sunday."

After refreshing himself with three more glasses of wine, he began a stirring Cossack song, but in the middle of it his voice broke, and he had to abandon the attempt, though he continued the accompaniment.

"Ah, my friend!" he exclaimed, after a moment.

Olenine turned, struck by an unwonted tone in the old

man's voice. The old Cossack was weeping. Big tears were rolling down his wrinkled cheeks.

"My youth has gone forever; it will return no more!" he sobbed. "Drink, then, drink! Drown the unhappy thought in drink," he roared out suddenly, and without drying his tears.

One Circassian song was a great favorite with him. It was short and its principal charm consisted in a melancholy refrain: "Aï! daï! dalalaï!"

Jerochka translated the words of the song for Olenine.

A young Circassian went to the mountains. During his absence the Russians came, burned the village, massacred the men and carried the women away as slaves. The young man returns; he finds the place deserted—village, father, mother, brother, home have all disappeared. One solitary tree remains standing. He seats himself beneath it, and gives vent to his grief in the melancholy, "Aï! daï! dalalaï!"

The old Cossack repeated this refrain several times, then springing up, seized a rifle that was hanging on the wall, darted out of the cottage, and fired off both barrels; then he repeated "Aï! daï! dalalaï!" in a still sadder tone and became silent.

Olenine had followed him out on the porch, and now stood there gazing up at the clear sky, thickly studded with stars. The cornet's cottage was brilliantly lighted, and groups of young girls were standing on the porch, on the steps, and under the window. Several Cossacks ran out of the house and responded to the shots, and to the chorus of Jerochka's song, with the usual shrill cries.

"Why aren't you at the betrothal?" asked Olenine.

"Heaven bless them! Heaven bless them!" replied the old hunter, whose feelings had evidently been wounded. "But what a miserable set they are. I can't endure them. Let them enjoy themselves in their own way, and we'll do the same. Sha'n't we go back into the house now?"

Olenine assented.

"Does Lukashka seem very happy?" he asked. "Won't he stop in and see me as he goes back?"

"Lukashka? No. People have told him that I have been trying to get the girl for you. You can get her if you want her, that is if you don't begrudge a little money. I'll manage it for you if you want me to."

"No, no, uncle, money is of no use in a case like this. She doesn't care for me. It isn't worth while to say any more about it."

"No one loves us, poor orphans that we are!" mumbled Jerochka, beginning to weep again in a maudlin way.

Olenine drank rather more wine than usual as he sat listening to the old man's stories. "Lukashka is happy, and I am glad of it," he said to himself, but he felt terribly sad and depressed, though he could not have explained why. The old Cossack drank so much that he fell on the floor, and Vania was obliged to call in some soldiers to take him away. He was so furious at the old hunter's unseemly conduct that he even forgot to air his French on the occasion.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was August. There had not been a cloud in the sky for several days; the fierce rays of the sun were well nigh intolerable, and the scorching breeze that had been blowing ever since early morning filled the air with great clouds of dust and burning sand that settled thickly upon the reeds, the trees and the roofs of the houses. The grass and leaves were thickly coated with it, and the fields had become baked and sere. The bed of the Terek was nearly dry, and so was the pond, and all day long children splashed about in the little water that remained. The wild beasts had left the banks of the Terek, and taken refuge in the mountains. Swarms of gnats filled the air; the snowy

mountain-tops were hidden from sight by a thick haze; the air was heavy and oppressive. There were rumors, too, that some Abreks, taking advantage of the low water, had crossed the river, and were now lurking about the neighborhood. Every evening the setting sun looked like an immense ball of fire.

It was the busiest season of the year, the entire population being engaged with the vintage, and in gathering the melon crop. The gardens, filled with luxuriant vines, were the only places that afforded any shade. Great bunches of luscious grapes hung thick on every side, and ox-carts, heaped to the very top with purple fruit, creaked slowly along the roads leading from the vineyards. Little boys and girls, with their hands filled with the fruit, and garments stained with grape-juice, ran along the roads behind their mothers. At every step one met ragged laborers bearing large baskets of grapes on their shoulders. Shrouded to the eyes in their white handkerchiefs, the Cossack girls guided the oxen attached to huge wagons laden with fruit. The soldiers who met them usually asked for some, and the girls, jumping on the cart, gathered up great handfuls of grapes and threw them to the soldiers without stopping the team.

In some court-yards the work of tramping out the juice had already begun, and the air was filled with its pungent odor. Huge piles of red casks stood on the sidewalks, and bare-legged Tartar workmen were hard at work in the court-yards. The swine eagerly devoured and wallowed in the refuse, and the flat roofs of the outer kitchens were covered with rich red grapes that were drying in the sun.

The fruit of the year's labor was gathered with gay hearts, for it was unusually abundant. Merry laughter and gay jests resounded on every side.

Marianna was standing in their vineyard one noon, taking the family dinner from a cart that stood in the shade of a large peach-tree. Her father was sitting on the ground

opposite her. He had just returned from school, and was washing his hands in some water his little son had brought from the pond. Old Oulita, with her sleeves rolled high up on her strong, sunburned arms, was placing the dried fish, bread, grapes and curds on a low table.

The cornet wiped his hands, removed his cap, made the sign of the cross, and approached the table. The little boy seized the water-jug and drank greedily. The mother and daughter seated themselves with their legs crossed under them. Even in the shade the heat was suffocating, and the air seemed to scorch one. The cornet muttered another prayer, took a pitcher of wine, drank, and then passed it to his wife. His shirt was open at the throat, disclosing his hairy chest. His shrewd face wore a good-humored expression. There was no sign of affectation either in his manner or conversation to-day. He was merry and natural.

All the members of the family were in excellent spirits. Their work was progressing satisfactorily, and the yield had proved greater and of a better quality than they had anticipated.

After she had finished her own dinner Marianna fed the oxen, then, rolling up her mantle and placing it under her head for a pillow, she stretched herself out on the ground under the cart. Her face was flushed, her eyes heavy with sleep and fatigue, her breath labored. Since the beginning of the vintage season, a fortnight before, the girl's life had been one of incessant toil. She rose with the sun, and, after a hurried bath in cold water, ran barefooted to the stable; then, after hastily putting on her shoes, she harnessed the oxen, packed up the necessary food, and started for the vineyard, where the rest of the day was to be spent.

After a few minutes' rest at noon, the work of gathering the grapes began again, and when evening came she drove the cart home, tired but happy. After attending to the

cattle in the dim twilight, she filled her broad sleeves with sunflower seeds, and went out on the street corner to enjoy herself with the other girls; but as soon as it became really dark, she re-entered the house, and eat her supper, in company with her parents and younger brother. Afterward she generally perched herself on the stove and listened to their lodger's talk. When he left she threw herself on the bed and slept quietly and soundly until morning, when she began the same life over again. She had not seen Lukashka since their betrothal, and though she was looking forward to her marriage-day with quiet satisfaction, she had become accustomed to Olenine's presence, and felt considerably flattered by the close attention with which he watched her every movement.

CHAPTER XXXI.

In spite of the oppressive heat and the persecution of the gnats, Marianka had fallen into a doze, when her friend Oustinka came running up, and crawling under the cart, laid down beside her.

"Now let's go to sleep," she exclaimed. "Wait a minute, though," she added, springing up; "I don't call this very comfortable," and breaking off some branches, she covered the wheels, and then threw her mantle over them.

"Run away now," she said, authoritatively, to the little boy. "Is this any place for a Cossack? Clear out, I say."

Left alone with her friend, Oustinka threw one arm around her and kissed her affectionately.

"You dear little pet," she exclaimed, with a clear ringing laugh.

"Grandfather taught you that, I suppose," laughed Marianna. "Stop, I say."

And they both laughed so noisily that Marianna's mother began to scold them.

"I've got something to tell you," said Oustinka, more cautiously.

"What is it about?" asked Marianna, raising herself on her elbow, and tightening the handkerchief on her head.

"Something I've found out about you and your lodger."

"There's nothing to find out."

"What a little hypocrite you are! He comes to your house very often, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he does, but what of that?" asked Marianna, with a faint blush.

"I am a simple-minded girl; I tell you all my secrets. Why should I conceal them?" said Oustinka, her rosy face becoming thoughtful. "Do I harm any one by doing so? I love him; that is the long and short of it."

"Who? Beletsky?"

"Yes."

"It is a sin," said Marianna.

"But, Machinka, when is one to enjoy life if not when one is young? By and by, when I marry a Cossack, I shall have nothing but care and hard work. When you are married to Lukashka you'll have neither the time nor the opportunity to enjoy yourself; you will have nothing to look forward to but children and hard work."

"Some people are happy even when they are married. It makes very little difference, though, either way," said Marianna, calmly.

"But tell me, just this once, what has passed between you and Lukashka?"

"Nothing. He asked my hand in marriage, and my father insisted that we should wait a year. He has asked for me again since. We are now betrothed, and we shall be married in the fall."

"What has he said to you?"

"What men usually say, I suppose. He says he loves me, and he is always asking me to walk with him in the garden."

"An invitation you do not accept, I suppose. What a handsome fellow he is getting to be! Kirka tells me that he has just got a splendid new horse. He is very lonely away from you, I suppose. Has he ever told you so?"

"You seem determined to know all," said Marianna, laughing. "Well, he came to the window one night. He was drunk, and wanted me to let him in."

"Did you do it?"

"Certainly not. I had told him before that I wouldn't, and I shall keep my word, you may be sure."

"He's awfully handsome. There are not many girls who could resist him. Don't you love him?"

"Yes, I love him, but I'm not going to be guilty of any folly. It would be wrong."

Oustinka let her head fall on her companion's breast, and clasping her in her arms, laughed until she shook all over.

"Simpleton! it is happiness you are rejecting!" she exclaimed, attempting to tickle her companion's neck.

"Stop, let me alone," cried Marianna, laughing.

"Can't you young devils be quiet?" growled the sleepy voice of the old woman.

"You are refusing a wonderful piece of good fortune," continued Oustinka. "If I were in your place what handsome presents I would get out of your lodger. I watched him the night he was at our house, and he seemed to be positively devouring you with his eyes. He is one of the richest Russians here, and has hundreds of serfs, his servant says."

Marianna smiled thoughtfully.

"Would you like to know what he said to me once?" she asked, nibbling a blade of grass. "He said he wished he was the Cossack Lukashka, or my little brother Lazoutka. What did he mean, do you suppose?"

"Nothing, I guess. He only said the first thing that

came into his head, probably," replied Oustinka. "You would think my sweetheart was crazy the way he runs on."

Marianna laid her head back on her pillow again, and placed one hand on Oustinka's shoulder.

"He wanted to come and work in the vineyard with us to-day; my father invited him to," she remarked, after a short silence. In another moment she was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE peach-tree had ceased to cast a shadow on the ox-cart, and the slanting rays of the hot sun now forced their way through the branches and burned the faces of the sleeping girls. Marianna woke and began to arrange the kerchief on her head. As she glanced around she saw Olenine, with his gun upon his shoulder, talking with her father, so she nudged her companion and silently pointed to the young man.

"I didn't find a single one yesterday," remarked Olenine, looking anxiously about for Marianna, who was concealed from his sight by the branches.

"Go to the other side of the vineyard, describe a semi-circle, and you will find yourself in an orchard where hares are as plentiful as the most enthusiastic sportsman could desire," replied the cornet, in his usual florid style.

"It is no easy matter to find hares this time of the year. You had better stay and help us," said the old woman, gayly. "Come, children, it's time to go to work again now."

Since Olenine had given Lukashka a horse worth fifty rubles his host and hostess had become much more civil; indeed, the cornet seemed well pleased to see the Russian in Marianna's company.

"But I don't know how to work," said Olenine, keeping his eyes studiously averted from the cart under which

he had caught a glimpse of Marianna's red handkerchief and blue skirt.

"Then I'll give you some apricots," replied the old woman.

"That is an antiquated custom to which my wife still adheres," remarked the cornet, as if he felt it necessary to make excuses for his wife. "In Russia you would not only have plenty of apricots, but pine-apples as well."

"So there are hares in that old orchard?" inquired Olenine. "Well, I'll go and take a look at them," and casting a hasty glance through the branches, he lifted his cap and disappeared behind the long straight vine rows.

The sun was low in the horizon when Olenine returned to the garden. The breeze had died away, but the air was growing cooler. Seeing Marianna's blue gown in the distance, Olenine walked toward her, plucking a grape now and then as he passed. Marianna was deftly severing the heavy clusters from the vines and placing them in a basket. She paused without letting go her hold on the branch and smiled sweetly. Olenine stepped up to her, flinging his rifle across his shoulder, so his hands would be at liberty. He intended to ask her if she were alone, but he could only lift his cap. Not a single word could he utter. He felt terribly ill at ease when alone with Marianna, yet, voluntary martyr that he was, he stepped still closer to her.

"You run a great risk of shooting some one with your rifle," remarked Marianna.

"I'll take good care not to do that."

There was a short silence, then:

"Why don't you help me?" she asked.

He took a small knife from his pocket, and began work. Soon, drawing out from behind the leaves a large bunch which weighed at least three pounds and on which the grapes were crowded close together, he showed it to Marianna.

"Shall I cut this? Is it ripe?" he asked.

"Give it to me."

Their hands touched. Olenine seized that of the young girl. She made no attempt to withdraw it, only gazed at him smilingly.

"Do you expect to be married soon?" he asked.

She gave him a stern, forbidding look, and averted her head.

"Do you love Lukashka?"

"Is that any business of yours?" she answered, curtly.

"I envy him."

"Nonsense!"

"I do. I swear I do! You are so beautiful."

Suddenly realizing how trite and commonplace were his words, he blushed scarlet, and seized both the girl's hands.

"Pretty or ugly, I am not for you. Why do you try to amuse yourself at my expense?"

But Marianna's eyes contradicted her words; she knew only too well that he was in earnest, terribly in earnest.

Though his words sounded even more commoplace and out of harmony with his feelings than before, he continued, eagerly:

"I don't know what I wouldn't do for you if you would let me."

"Don't come here bothering me, you rascal!"

But the girl's sparkling eyes and heaving bosom contradicted the words she had just uttered.

Olenine said to himself that she must realize his sincerity in spite of the tameness and constraint of his words, and that she must have long been aware of the sentiments he was unable to express. She only pretended not to understand because she was unwilling to give him an answer.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the voice of Oustinka, apparently only a few steps from them.

"Come and help me, Mitri Andreitch," she called out to Olenine, as her plump, naïve face suddenly peered out of a mass of vines close by.

Olenine stood silent and motionless. Marianna continued her work, though without taking her eyes from the young man's face. He attempted to speak, but suddenly checking himself, shrugged his shoulders, picked up his rifle, and strode hastily away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THAT night the sergeant came and woke Olenine. The company was about starting on an expedition. Olenine was delighted to have an excuse for leaving, and resolved never to return. The campaign lasted four days. At its close the commander, who was related to Olenine, offered him a position on his staff; but Olenine refused it. He could not live away from the station, and asked permission to return to it. He received the cross for which he had once longed so ardently, but for which he now cared not a straw, and started in company with Vania for the station several hours in advance of the others.

He spent the evening on the porch gazing at Marianna and the night in pacing the court-yard, without any definite plan or aim.

It was late when he woke the next morning, and the cornet's family had gone to the vineyard. Feeling no desire to hunt, he took a book and went out on the porch, but soon re-entered the house and threw himself on the bed. Vania felt sure that his master must be sick. Toward evening he got up and began to write in his journal. He also wrote a letter, but he did not post it. He felt sure that no one would understand what he had written, and he told himself that it was not of the slightest consequence whether any one else understood it or not. The contents of this were as follows:

"My friends in Russia express great anxiety about me. They fear that I am becoming utterly ruined in this savage wilderness, that I am becoming dissipated in my habits,

and that I am degenerating in every respect. Above all, they fear that I will marry a Cossack girl. General Yermolou even went so far as to say that a man who spends ten years in the Caucasus is sure either to become a drunkard or to marry a worthless woman. This is appalling, indeed. It does seem true that I am throwing away my chances in life when I might have the rare good fortune to marry the Countess B——, and to become a chamberlain or marshal.

"Ah! how sordid and despicable you all are! There is not one among you who has any idea of true happiness, who has once felt its pure charm. One must have seen and appreciated what I see before me every day, have seen the majestic mountains crowned with eternal snow and a superb woman of primitive beauty, such a woman as first came from the hands of the Creator, then those who pity me would know which of us is in the right.

"Ah! if you but knew the supreme contempt I feel for your delusions! When I look around my humble cottage, and when I gaze at the woman I love, and my thoughts revert to the fashionable drawing-rooms I once frequented, to the absurdly attired women with elaborately dressed false hair and painted cheeks, and misshapen forms so artfully disguised, and to the meaningless chatter which pretends to be an interchange of thought, but which is anything else, my heart is filled with loathing. I see again those rich heiresses whose stolid faces wear an expression that says more plainly than any words: You are at liberty to woo me, though I *am* rich; I think of the absurd rules of etiquette that teach you to whom you must offer your hand, and to whom you must bow, and to whom you must speak; I remember, too, the constant ennui that becomes a part of one's very blood and descends from generation to generation with the belief that all this is unavoidable and indispensable.

"Once fully comprehend the true and the beautiful, and

all your long-cherished idols will crumble into dust. True happiness consists in living in close communion with Nature; in seeing her, listening to her, talking to her.

"With what intense horror these friends of mine speak of their fear of seeing me marry a Cossack, while my only desire in life is to ruin myself in the sense they mean. I long to marry a poor Cossack girl, but dare not because it would be the height of happiness, and I am not worthy of it.

"Three months have passed since I saw Marianna for the first time. The prejudices of the world I had so recently left were still alive within me. I did not then believe that I could ever really love this girl. I admired her as I admired the beauty of the mountains and the radiance of the sky. I could not do otherwise, for she is as beautiful as nature itself. Afterward I felt that the contemplation of her beauty was becoming necessary, even indispensable to me; and I began to ask myself if I did really love her. Still the feeling I experienced was utterly unlike love—as I then understood it. It was not due to a feeling of loneliness or to a desire to marry; it was not platonic love; still less was it a carnal passion. I longed to see her, to hear her voice, to feel her presence; then, and then only was I not only happy, but calm.

"After the evening when I spoke to her for the first time, I felt that there was an indissoluble bond between us. Still I struggled against this feeling. I asked myself if I could possibly love a woman—a statue—merely for her beauty. And I loved her already, without even suspecting it.

"After we talked together for the first time our relations changed. Up to that time she had been to me the personification of all that is majestic and beautiful in nature; now she is a woman; I meet her often; I go to her father's vineyard; I spend long evenings at her home; but in spite of this familiar intercourse, she seems to me as

pure, majestic, and unapproachable as in the past. She is always calm, proud, and indifferent. Her manner is sometimes almost caressing; nevertheless, every glance, movement and word shows a coldness in which there is no tinge of scorn, and which is full of charm.

"Every day, with a feigned smile on my lips and a heart torn with passion, I try to please her, and even attempt to laugh and jest with her. She does not ignore my feeble attempts, but responds to them simply and candidly. The present state of affairs has become intolerable.

"A few days ago I resolved to continue the deception no longer, but to frankly avow my love for her. It was in her father's vineyard, and I told her of my love in words of which I am deeply ashamed. I ought not to have spoken as I did; she is as immeasurably superior to me as the passion I tried to express is superior to the poor, stammering words in which I gave vent to my feelings. She bade me be silent; and I have known no peace since. I am not worthy to touch the hem of her garment; and I ask myself in despair what I am to do. In my senseless dream she is sometimes my mistress, sometimes my wife; but both these ideas are equally distasteful to me. To make her my mistress would be horrible—it would be murder. To marry her, to attempt to transform her into a lady, would be even worse. Ah! if I could only transform myself into a Cossack like Lukashka; if I could steal horses, murder people, get drunk, and creep to her window at night without a thought of remorse; in short, if I could transform myself into a magnificent animal, we might understand each other and be happy. I have tried, and I have seen my weakness. I can not forget my complicated and unnatural past, and the future seems hopeless. I gaze at the snowy mountains and at this superb woman, and sorrowfully say to myself that the only real happiness in this world is not for me, and that this woman can never be mine. And the most cruel and yet the most blissful thing about it all is that I

understand this woman, and that she will never understand me, for she is a true child of nature—beautiful and impassable. And I, poor, weak creature, dare to wish that she could understand my mental and moral deformity and my torture of mind! I spend my sleepless night in walking to and fro under her windows, unable to comprehend what is going on in my own soul.

"On the 15th of August our company went on an expedition. I was absent four days. I took no interest whatever in all that went on around me. The campaign, the card-playing, and the endless discussions regarding probable promotions and decorations seemed even more tiresome than usual. I returned last evening, and the joy I experienced on again beholding her and my humble home was so intense that I understand my feelings at last. I love this woman with a deep, intense, all-absorbing passion. I feel no fear of degrading myself by this love; I glory in it. The sentiment is not the creation of my own will; it has taken possession of me against my will. I tried to drive it from my heart, but in vain. I even attempted to immolate myself on the sacrificial altar and rejoice in my rival's happiness and good fortune; but this only increased my love and my jealousy. It is no ideal sentiment, nor an infatuation created by the imagination; still less is it a sensual passion. Perhaps it is nature itself, or rather the incarnation of all that is beautiful which I so intensely love in her. My will has had no voice in the matter. My love seems to have been brought about by the very power of the elements, the power of God himself. All nature seems to force this love upon me and to cry out to me imperiously: 'Love.' I love her with my whole soul, and in loving her I feel myself an inseparable part of God's glorious universe.

"I have alluded before to the new theories and convictions, which were perhaps only the natural result of my life of seclusion. No one can form any conception of the mental conflicts they have cost me, of my happiness on behold-

ing the new path they opened before me, or of how dear they were to me. But love came; all my fine theories vanished in smoke—and I do not regret them. I do not even understand how I could have accepted such a dreary belief. Beauty revealed itself to me in all its splendor, and the stately structure upon which I had expended all the powers of my intellect crumbled into dust. I do not mourn its downfall. Self-sacrifice—what nonsense! It is nothing but pride, the desire to escape suffering, the jealousy excited by the sight of another's happiness. Live for my neighbor? Do good? Why should I, when I really love only myself, and have but one desire—to win her and live her life? I am no longer troubled by a solicitude for the happiness of others. It is not for Lukashka I now crave happiness, it is for myself. Only a few weeks ago I should have reproached myself bitterly for thoughts like these; I should have tormented myself with thoughts of the possible consequences to Lukashka. Now I am indifferent; I seem to have lost all volition of my own, and to be driven onward by some irresistible force. I suffer, but I live—my former existence was only death in life.

"This very day I will see her and tell her all."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was late that evening when Olenine, after finishing his letter, went to the cornet's cottage. The old woman was sitting on a bench reeling cocoons; Marianna, with her hair uncovered, was sewing by the light of a candle. She sprung up on Olenine's entrance, and seizing her handkerchief hurried toward the stove.

"Stay here with us, Marianna," said her mother.

"No, I'm bareheaded," she replied, climbing upon the stove.

Olenine had brought his landlady some tea, and she in return treated him to some curds, and urged him to help

himself to her wine, with the rough but hearty hospitality almost invariably displayed by those who earn their living by the sweat of the brow. The old woman, whose rudeness had so offended Olenine at first, often touched him now by the tenderness with which she spoke of her daughter.

"God be praised! we have enough and to spare!" she exclaimed. "We have plenty of salt fish put away, and three hogsheads of wine to sell, besides what we shall want for our own use. You mustn't think of going away, but stay here and have a good time at the wedding."

"And when is the wedding to be?" asked Olenine. All the blood in his body seemed to rush to his face, and his heart beat fast and painfully.

He heard a slight movement behind the stove, followed by the crunching of sunflower seeds.

"It might be next week; so far as we are concerned, we are ready. We have everything prepared, and we shall give our daughter a snug little dowry; but I am sorry to say that Lukashka is causing us some anxiety just now. He has been drinking hard and doing all sorts of foolish things. We heard the other day that he had gone up in the Tartar country."

"He runs a great risk."

"So I think. I told him, too, that he had better take care. But he is young and reckless. Of course all young men are imprudent, but there is reason in all things. He has run off horses and killed an Abrek, and that ought to satisfy him for awhile; but instead of that, he seems inclined to go too far entirely."

"I saw him a couple of times when I was out on the expedition; he had just bought another horse," said Olenine, glancing toward the stove.

The stern, even hostile light that shone in Marianna's large black eyes alarmed him.

"Well, it is his own money he is spending, I suppose,"

said Marianna, curtly. "I don't see that any one else need trouble himself about it."

As she spoke she jumped down from the stove and flounced out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

After that Olenine sat with his eyes fixed on the door, anxiously awaiting the girl's return.

Some time afterward visitors entered—a brother of old Oulita and Uncle Jerochka. Following them came Marianna and Oustinka. Olenine felt embarrassed and uncomfortable. He longed to go away, but had not the courage. The old Cossack came to his relief by asking him for some wine, and they all took a glass together; but the more Olenine drank the heavier his heart seemed to grow. The two old men soon became boisterous; the girls sat behind the stove, and laughed and whispered while they watched the men drink. Olenine drank even more than the others. At last the Cossacks became very noisy, and Mother Oulita threatened to turn them out of the house, and absolutely refused to give them any more wine. It was ten o'clock when they left, after requesting Olenine's permission to finish their "lark" at his house. Oustinka ran home, and the old woman went into the outer kitchen to put things in order for the night. Marianna was left alone. Olenine felt as fresh and well as if he had just woke from a long night's sleep; and letting the two old Cossacks pass him, he turned and stepped back into the cottage.

Marianna had thrown herself down on the bed. Olenine went up to her and tried to speak, but his voice failed him. Hastily raising herself upon her elbow, Marianna gazed at him with a wild, almost terrified expression in her beautiful eyes. She was evidently afraid of him, and Olenine felt sorry and ashamed.

"Are you never going to take pity on me, Marianna?" he asked. "You have no idea how much I love you."

"It's the wine that makes you talk this way."

"No, I am not drunk. Refuse Lukashka. I will marry you."

"What have I said?" he thought, as he uttered the promise. "Shall I be willing to repeat those words to-morrow? Yes, unquestionably, now and at any time," responded an inward voice.

"Will you consent to marry me?" he insisted.

She looked at him gravely; her fears had evidently subsided.

"Marianna, I am going mad; speak! I will do whatever you wish!" he cried, passionately.

And a torrent of incoherent, impassioned words burst from his lips.

"Why do you talk such nonsense?" she exclaimed, taking the hand he extended, and pressing it warmly in her own firm, strong fingers. "Is it likely that a gentleman would marry a poor Cossack girl?"

"Will you marry me?" he repeated. "There is nothing in the whole wide world—"

"But what shall we do with Lukashka?" she asked, laughing.

He tore his hand from her grasp and threw his arms around the girl, but she freed herself from his embrace, and springing to the floor, fled like a frightened fawn. Olenine, on coming to himself, was amazed at his own audacity; but he did not feel the slightest remorse. On his return home he took no notice of the old Cossacks who had so unceremoniously quartered themselves upon him, but went immediately to bed, and slept more soundly than he had slept for a long, long time.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE next day was a fête day, and the streets of the village were thronged with people in holiday garb. The vintage had been unusually abundant; the labors of the season

were ended, and weddings were soon to take place in several families.

In the afternoon a large crowd assembled in front of the shops in the public square, and on the terrace in front of the government offices sat a number of old gray-headed Cossacks gravely discussing the harvest, military affairs and the good old times of their youth, while they gravely and majestically watched the movements of the rising generation.

The women and young girls bowed low as they passed; the young men slackened their pace and uncovered their heads. Some of the patriarchs surveyed passers-by in a friendly fashion; others rather sternly, returning the salute but slowly.

The games and dance had not begun, but the women were gathering in little groups on the terraces and were laughing and chatting noisily. A number of children were playing in the square, throwing their balls up into the air and then catching them again, with shrill cries of delight. Several half-grown girls were dancing and singing on the other side of the street. An Armenian merchant in a blue broadcloth coat, trimmed with gold braid, was standing in the door-way of his shop, awaiting customers with all the gravity of an Oriental who is fully conscious of his own importance. Two barefooted Circassians, with beards dyed red, were sitting cross-legged at the gate of a friend's house, smoking their pipes and commenting on the crowd. They had come from the other side of the Terek to attend the festival. At rare intervals a soldier might be seen making his way through the crowd. The cottages were all closed, the porches having been carefully washed the evening before. Even the elderly women were in the street. The ground was thickly strewed with melon, sunflower and pumpkin seeds. The air was mild and still; the sky blue and transparent. The snow-capped mountains, tinged with a roseate hue by the rays of the declining sun, seemed

only a short distance off. The ominous sound of a gun-shot was wafted now and then from the other side of the river, but in the village mirth and revelry alone were heard.

Olenine had spent the morning in the court-yard waiting for Marianna, but when her household duties were performed she went to church, after which she seated herself on the terrace with the other girls. She had brought several peddlers to the house during the day, in order that they might show her mother their merchandise, and each time she passed she gave Olenine a pleasant smile. He dared not address a word to her in the presence of others, but was determined to finish his conversation of the previous evening and obtain a decisive answer. He waited for a favorable opportunity, but this did not present itself, and feeling that he could endure this suspense no longer, he followed her, but passed the street corner where she was sitting without approaching her. As he passed he heard a laugh behind him, and his heart sunk like lead. When he reached Beletsky's cottage, which fronted on the square, Olenine heard his friend call him by name, so he reluctantly entered.

After chatting a moment, the two young men seated themselves at the window. Jerochka, arrayed in his new coat, soon joined them.

"There's a good-looking crowd for you," remarked Beletsky, laughing and pointing to the gay group of girls on the street corner. "My girl is among them. The one in a red dress. It is a new gown, by the way, and she looks as sweet as a peach in it. When it gets dark we'll join them and take them over to Oustinka's house and have a dance."

"I'll come," replied Olenine, quickly. "Will Marianna be there?"

"Certainly," answered Beletsky, not in the least aston-

ished, apparently. "Isn't it a picturesque sight?" he added, pointing to the motley crowd.

"Charming," responded Olenine, with pretended indifference. "Though when I witness such a fête I always wonder why people celebrate any particular day in the month when everything is always so gay and bright here. The peoples' faces, their movements, their costumes, and the very air and sunlight all seem full of joy. We have nothing like it in our country."

"That is true," replied Beletsky, though he really took very little interest in these criticisms. "Why don't you help yourself to wine, old fellow?" he asked, turning to Jerochka.

"Is your friend proud?" inquired Jerochka, turning to Olenine, with a meaning wink.

Beletsky laughed and poured out a glass for himself.

"*Allah birdez*"—(God has given it)—he said, as he raised the glass to his lips.

"Good health to you!" responded Uncle Jerochka, smiling as he emptied his own glass.

"You say that everything here wears a holiday air," remarked the old Cossack, rising and going to the window. "Do you call this a holiday? If you could only have seen the festivals we had when I was young, you wouldn't think so. In those days the women came out in *sarafans*, richly embroidered with gold braid, and a double necklace of gold coins on their bosoms. They wore gold crowns on their heads, and what a rustling their garments made as they passed. They looked like princesses, and such a hub-bub as they kept up all night with their singing and their games. The men used to roll great hogsheads of wine out into the court-yards, and sit there and drink until daylight. Sometimes, linking arms, they used to tear through the village like an avalanche, seizing everybody they met and dragging them along from house to house. They generally kept this up for three days. I can remember my father

coming home with a face as red as fire, his cap gone, and without a penny in his pocket. My mother knew what to do; she went and got some brandy and caviare to sober him down, and then ran out in search of his cap. Sometimes he slept for two whole days after his spree. That's the kind of men we had in those days. You don't see any like them now."

"And did the girls amuse themselves alone?" inquired Beletsky.

"Alone? No, a crowd of men would come up on horseback, sometimes shouting: 'Let's break up the game!' and ride their horses right upon the girls. The girls would arm themselves with sticks and beat the men and the horses like fury. When they had broken the ring, each Cossack would seize the girl he liked best, and ride off at a gallop. One could have some fun in those days, and how the girls used to love us! And what beauties they were — regular queens!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Just then two horsemen emerged from a side street. One was Lukashka, the other Nazarka. Lukashka was sitting a little sideways on his beautiful horse, which pranced lightly along, tossing its handsome head and glossy mane. His rider's dress testified to the fact that he was just from camp; but his nonchalant manner, and the complacent expression that shone in his handsome black eyes showed that he was fully impressed with the superiority of his strength and personal appearance.

"Have you ever seen a handsomer and more daring fellow?" his eyes seemed to say. His superb horse, with its silver trappings, his fine weapons, and the remarkable beauty of the young man himself, attracted general attention, and were all the more noticeable by reason of the shabby and insignificant appearance of his companion.

As he passed the old man, Lukashka paused and raised his white cap deferentially.

"How many horses did you take from the Tartars?" asked one little old man.

"You must have counted them yourself, grandfather, so why do you ask?" retorted Lukashka, laughingly, as he turned away.

"You did very wrong to take that fellow with you," continued the old man, sullenly.

"The devil! he seems to know all about it," thought Lukashka, considerably annoyed; but seeing the group of girls on the street corner, he turned his steps in that direction. "How are you, girls?" he shouted, reining in his horse. "You've grown old in my absence. I'd no idea you would miss me so much."

"How do you do, Lukashka? how do you do?" cried several merry voices. "Did you bring plenty of money with you? Have you come to stay long? We haven't seen you for an age."

"Nazarka and I have come only for the night," replied Lukashka, starting his horse and riding straight toward the girls.

"Marianka has had plenty of time to forget you," said Oustinka, nudging her friend and bursting into a shrill laugh.

Marianna retreated a little as the horse approached, and throwing back her head, looked gravely at the young Cossack with calm, shining eyes.

"Yes, it is a long time since I've seen you," she remarked, coolly. "Do you want to trample us under your horse's hoofs?" she asked, dryly, as she turned away.

Lukashka had been in remarkably good humor, but Marianna's coldness seemed to nettle him, and he frowned darkly.

"Put your foot in the stirrup, my dear, and I'll carry you off to the mountains!" he exclaimed, suddenly bend-

ing toward Marianna. "I'll kiss you, too! Yes, I'll kiss you!"

Marianna glanced up at him, and meeting his gaze, blushed deeply.

"Clear out! your horse will be stepping on my feet next," she exclaimed, looking down at her blue embroidered stockings and neat red shoes.

"I'll go and put my horse away, and then we'll make a night of it," replied Lukashka, and striking his horse with the whip, he dashed along into another street, closely followed by Nazarka, and finally drew rein in front of two houses that stood side by side.

"Here we are! Come, quick!" he shouted, boisterously. Stepka promptly obeyed the summons, and to her Lukashka intrusted his steed, telling her by signs to remove the saddle and give the animal some hay.

"How do you do, mother? Haven't you gone out yet?" cried Lukashka, as he mounted the steps.

"I've been waiting for you," she replied; "though Kirka told me that you were not coming."

"Well, bring us some wine, mother. Nazarka and I want to have a little fun now we're here."

"Very well, Lukashka, very well," replied his mother, and taking her keys she hurried off to the wine-cellar.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"HERE'S to your health and salvation!" cried Lukashka, cautiously raising to his lips the brimming bowl of wine his mother had brought him.

"That old man seems to suspect something," remarked Nazarka. "Did you hear him ask how many horses you had stolen?"

"The old scoundrel!" said Lukashka, shortly. "Well, the horses are safe on this side of the river now, so it doesn't matter much."

"It is rather unfortunate though."

"And why? We'll make it all right with him by giving him some wine to-morrow. That will be the safest way. Now we've nothing to do but enjoy ourselves. Let's go and find the girls and make things lively till morning."

Just then Uncle Jerochka and Yergouchou entered the cottage.

"Bring us another half gallon, mother," cried Lukashka, in answer to the greetings of the new-comers.

"So you've been running off horses, you young rascal!" cried Uncle Jerochka. "Tell me all about it. You're a brave fellow; I adore you."

"Oh, yes, you adore me," exclaimed Lukashka, laughing, "and yet take my girl presents from that rich Russian, you old devil you!"

"It's a lie! it's a lie! The young man has begged me to arrange matters for him again and again. Indeed he promised me a fine rifle if I would, but I wouldn't consent to do anything that would injure you in any way. Come, now, tell where you got the horses."

The old man began to talk in the Tartar language, and Lukashka replied in the same tongue, and without a shadow of reserve.

Yergouchou did not understand Tartar very well, so his curiosity getting the better of him, he said in Russian:

"I know for a certainty that you ran off a lot of horses. How much earnest money have you received for them?"

"I've got the entire amount here," replied Lukashka, patting his pocket complacently.

He paused suddenly, for his mother was just entering the room.

"Come, let's drink," he shouted, lustily.

"I remember starting out with my friend Guirtchek one day—" began Jerochka.

"I can't stop to listen to that yarn," cried Lukashka. "I'm going."

He drained his bowl, then tightening his belt around his waist, he left the cottage.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was dark when Lukashka again stepped into the street. The autumnal night was cool and still. The full moon was visible above the tops of the tall plane-trees that bordered one side of the public square. Lights were shining from some of the windows, and laughter, singing and crunching of seeds were even louder than they had been in the daytime.

Opposite one of the lighted shops was a crowd of men and women, laughing and singing. The young girls had joined hands and formed a ring, and were whirling gayly around and around to the music of their own voices. The thinnest and ugliest girl led the singing:

"Whom shall I marry!
The fair-haired youth? the fair-haired youth?"

The older women were listening to the songs; the children ran about in the darkness; the young men were teasing the girls, and sometimes breaking the ring and forcing their way into it. Olenine and Beletsky, in Cossack uniform, were standing in the shadow discussing the best way of getting Marianka and Oustinka out of the ring. Beletsky supposed that his companion only wanted a little fun, but Olenine was tremblingly awaiting a decision that was to affect his whole future life. He was determined to obtain a decisive answer from Marianna. Would she marry him or not? He felt convinced that she would refuse, but he hoped to be able to tell her his feelings this time, and to make her understand the situation more clearly than she now seemed to do.

"Why didn't you tell me before, and I could have arranged it through Oustinka?" remarked Beletsky. "What a strange fellow you are!"

"How can it be managed? Do devise some way! Some day, soon, perhaps, I will tell you all, but for Heaven's sake get her to come down to Oustinka's house for a few minutes," said Olenine.

"Oh, that's an easy matter. Well, Marianna, so it's the light-haired fellow you're going to marry, not Lukashka?" exclaimed Beletsky, referring to the words of the song.

He addressed the remark to Marianna, merely for the sake of appearance, as he approached Oustinka and whispered to her to bring her friend home with her; but he had hardly finished speaking when the girls struck up another song, and again began dragging one another around and around:

"A handsome young fellow walked down the street,
As he first passed by he waved his hand;
The second time he waved his hat;
When next he came he paused and cried:
'I really must see you, my darling dear,
Why won't you come out in the garden with me,
Can it be that you scorn me, my darling dear?
Take care, for marry you I certainly shall,
And make you shed many a tear,'"

they sung gayly.

Just then Lukashka and Nazarka came up, and the former, tearing the girls' hands asunder, dashed into the middle of the ring and began to sing in a shrill voice, waving his arms all the while.

"Come in here, one of you," he cried after a moment.

The young girls tried to push Marianna into the ring, but she would not go.

Lukashka, as he passed Olenine, gave him a friendly nod.

"So you've come to see the fun, too, Mitri Andreitch," he remarked.

"Yes," replied Olenine, shortly.

Beletsky leaned toward Oustinka and whispered a word

or two in her ear. She had not time to answer then, but as she passed next time she said to him:

"All right; we'll come."

"And Marianna?"

Olenine stepped to that young girl's side and whispered, hurriedly:

"Won't you come? Do, if only for a moment; I want to speak to you."

"If the other girls go I will."

"Will you give me an answer?" he asked, again bending over her. "How gay you are to-day."

She moved on, but he followed her.

"Will you answer my question?" he repeated.

"What question?"

"The question I asked you yesterday; if you will marry me," he whispered in her ear.

Marianna seemed to reflect a moment.

"I will give you an answer this evening," she said at last.

He fancied that her eyes shone almost caressingly upon him through the darkness, and he would have continued to follow her on her round had not Lukashka seized her by the arm and pulled her into the middle of the ring, so Olenine had only time to say:

"Then come to Oustinka's house."

The singing ceased; Lukashka wiped his lips, Marianna did the same, and they kissed each other.

"No, no, I want five," exclaimed Lukashka, kissing the now struggling girl repeatedly.

After this the dancing ceased, and a regular romp ensued.

Lukashka was in the gayest possible spirits, and began to distribute sweetmeats among the girls.

"I'm going to give some to all of you," he said, with comical solemnity. "But if there's any girl that loves

soldiers here I give her notice to leave," he added, with a rather malicious glance at Olenine.

The girls snatched the dainties eagerly, and Beletsky and Olenine moved away.

Lukashka took off his cap, wiped his forehead on his sleeve, and stepped up to Marianna and Oustinka.

"Can it be that you scorn me, my darling dears?" he said, repeating the words of the song. Then addressing Marianna only he added, angrily:

> "Take care, for marry you I certainly shall,
> And make you shed many a tear."

Then he threw his arms around both girls and hugged them with all his might.

Oustinka jerked herself free and dealt him a heavy blow on the back.

"Are you going to dance any more?" asked Lukashka.

"The other girls can if they want to, but I'm going home now, and I'm going to take Marianna with me."

Still keeping his arm around Marianna's waist, Lukaska led her a little way out of the crowd.

"Don't go with her, Machinka," he said. "Go home and I will soon join you there."

"Why should I go home? What is the use of a holiday if one is not to enjoy one's self? I'm going to Oustinka's.'

"I shall marry you, understand, all the same."

"All right; we'll see about that," retorted Marianna.

"Are you really going?" insisted the Cossack, clasping Marianna still more closely and kissing her on the cheek.

"Let me alone, will you?"

And suddenly freeing herself from his embrace, the girl ran away.

"You'll be sorry for this some day," cried Lukashka, shaking his head reproachfully. "I'll make you shed many a tear, remember."

Then turning away he called out to the other young girls to come and play something.

Marianna paused, half frightened.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that you'll be sorry some day for what you are doing."

"I don't understand you."

"I mean that you are flirting with your lodger and that you don't care for me any more."

"I shall do as I please. It's no business of yours. You are not my father or my mother, and you've no right to dictate to me. I shall like whom I please."

"So what I heard is true," exclaimed Lukashka. "Very well, remember what I have just said to you. Come, girls, let's have another game," he cried, rejoining the group. "Run and get us some wine, Nazarka."

"Are they coming?" asked Olenine, anxiously.

"Yes, and at once," replied Beletsky. "Come, let us hurry on and make our preparations for the ball."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE night was far spent when Olenine left Beletsky's cottage a few moments after the departure of Marianna and Oustinka. The moon was sinking below the horizon, and a silvery mist enveloped the now silent village. All the lights had been extinguished and a profound stillness reigned, broken only by the light footsteps of the departing guests, whose white head dresses were still dimly visible in the distance. Olenine's heart was throbbing tumultuously, and his face burned like fire. As he stepped out into the cool night air the change was most delightful, and he stood for a moment gazing up at the starry sky. Then he glanced back at the cottage he had just left, and seeing that the lights were already out, he involuntarily turned to look at the white handkerchiefs vanishing in the distance. He was so happy that he could not bear the thought of re-

maining alone, so springing down the steps he ran to overtake the girls.

"Go away, somebody will see you," cried Oustinka.

"That makes no difference."

Olenine threw his arms around Marianna and pressed her to his heart. She made no resistance.

"Come, come, that will do," said Oustinka. "Wait until you're married. You'll have plenty of time to hug her then."

"Farewell, Marianka, I shall speak to your father to-morrow. Don't say anything to him in the meantime."

"What is there for me to say?" replied Marianna, coolly.

The two girls ran off and Olenine walked on alone, reviewing the events of the evening. It had been spent virtually alone with Marianna in a quiet corner behind the stove. Oustinka, the other girls and Beletsky had not left the room, but they had shown no disposition to interrupt the whispered conversation Olenine was holding with Marianna.

"Will you marry me?" he asked.

"You wouldn't have me," she answered, calmly, but smilingly.

"Do you love me? Tell me, for God's sake!" he pleaded.

"Why shouldn't I love you? You're not an ogre," said Marianna, laughing.

"I am not jesting. Will you consent to be my wife? Answer me, I beg of you?"

"Why shouldn't I if my father approves."

"If you deceive me I shall go mad. I will speak to your parents to-morrow."

Marianna burst into a hearty laugh.

"Why do you laugh?"

"It is so funny!"

"I mean what I say. I will buy a cottage and a vine-

yard and transform myself as far as possible into a Cossack."

"Take care and not make love to other women. I am very jealous."

Olenine now recalled these words with intense delight, but at the time the unruffled calmness with which they were uttered had annoyed him not a little. She was not agitated in the least; indeed, she seemed to attach no importance to his words and to be entirely unconscious of the enviable position offered her. Perhaps she loved him just at that moment, but she seemed to have no thought of the future. He was delighted that she had consented to marry him, however, and he tried hard to believe her.

"Yes, when she is my wife, we shall soon learn to understand each other. A few words are not enough to prove a love like mine; a whole life is needed. Everything must be settled to-morrow; I can not live any longer in this way. To-morrow I will tell her father, Beletsky—everybody."

In the meantime Lukashka had taken so much wine that for the first time in his life he could not stand erect, and he slept away the night in Yamka's saloon.

CHAPTER XL.

OLENINE woke later than usual the next morning, and with the first moment of waking came the thought of what was before him. He remembered with rapture the kisses of the evening before, the firm hands that had pressed his, and the words: "How white your hands are!"

He had jumped out of bed with the intention of going immediately to make a formal request for Marianna's hand in marriage when an unwonted commotion in the street attracted his attention. People were hurrying to and fro, talking and gesticulating excitedly, and horses were pawing and neighing. Olenine threw on his clothes and stepped

out on the porch. Five mounted Cossacks were engaged in a noisy discussion; Lukashka's voice could be heard high above the others. They were all talking at the same time, and it seemed impossible to make any sense out of what they were saying.

"We ought to send word to the principal station at once," cried one.

"Let's hurry on and try to overtake them."

"Which road had we better take?"

"There can be no doubt on that score," cried Lukashka. "We must go by the middle gate, of course."

"Yes, that will be the shortest way," answered a Cossack, mounted on a powerful horse and covered with dust.

Lukashka's face was red and swollen from the excesses of the previous night, and his hat was on the back of his head.

"What's the matter? Where are you going?" shouted Olenine, though he did not make himself heard without considerable difficulty.

"We are going out to capture some Abreks, and must start immediately, though there are hardly enough of us."

And the Cossacks rode on, talking and shouting boisterously. Olenine felt obliged to accompany them, but hoped that he would be able to return before very long, so he dressed himself, loaded his rifle, vaulted on his horse, which had been hurriedly saddled by Vania, and hastened on to overtake the Cossacks. Despite their haste they had stopped to draw some wine from a barrel that had been brought out for them. They poured the wine into a wooden bowl and drank it after a short prayer for the success of their enterprise. A dandyfied young cornet who chanced to be at their head had constituted himself commander of the expedition, but in spite of his lordly airs the Cossacks showed no intention of obeying any one but Lukashka.

As for Olenine, no one paid the slightest attention to

him. When they had again mounted their horses and started, Olenine rode up to the cornet and asked for further information, but the youthful leader, though usually very affable, answered in such a supercilious way that it was not without considerable difficulty Olenine succeeded in ascertaning that the patrol sent out in search of Abreks had discovered several hiding in the reeds about six miles from the station. These Abreks, who were snugly ensconced in a ditch, had opened fire on the patrol, so leaving two Cossacks to watch them the corporal had come to the station in search of reinforcements.

The sun was rising when they reached the steppe, which began about three miles from the village. Before them stretched a lonely, arid plain. The fierce drought had destroyed all vegetation except in the few low and damp spots, and the absence of trees and the melancholy aspect of the landscape struck one very forcibly. At sunrise and sunset on the steppes the sun always reminds one of a huge ball of fire, and the slightest wind raises huge clouds of sand. When the day is calm, as it chanced to be on this occasion, everything is silent and motionless.

The Cossacks rode on in silence. Their weapons made no noise; a Cossack would be ashamed of any such display of awkwardness. Two Cossacks from the station overtook them and exchanged a few words with them, then they all rode on together in silence. Suddenly Lukashka's horse stumbled; this was an unfortunate omen. The other Cossacks glanced furtively at one another; then hastily averted their gaze without making any allusion to the incident. Lukashka frowned darkly, set his teeth, and raised his whip. The spirited animal reared and plunged as if about to take flight. Lukashka gave him two or three stinging blows, and the horse reared still more violently, then bounded forward, leaving the rest of the party some distance behind him.

"That's a fine animal!" remarked the cornet.

"A regular lion of a horse," responded one of the Cossacks.

The party rode on, sometimes at a walk, sometimes at a trot, and at last met a huge covered wagon moving slowly along. It was the property of a wandering Tartar, who was moving his family from one camp ground to another. Two women were gathering the droppings of the cattle to serve as fuel in the preparation of their morning repast. The cornet, who was not familiar with their language, questioned them without being able to make the timid and terrified women understand him.

Lukashka approached and accosted them familiarly in their native tongue, and the women, greatly relieved, answered him freely, as they would have answered a compatriot.

"*Ai, ai, ai, cop Abrek,*" they said, in a plaintive tone, pointing in the direction in which the Cossacks were going, and meaning that there was quite a large number of Abreks hiding in the ambuscade.

Olenine's knowledge of these expeditions being derived entirely from Uncle Jerochka's stories, he was determined to keep up with his companions, and see everything that was to be seen. He could not help admiring the Cossacks, who listened eagerly to the slightest sound, and gave close attention to the most trifling detail. Olenine had brought his weapons with him, but seeing that the Cossacks avoided him, he decided to remain a neutral witness of the engagement.

A shot suddenly resounded in the distance. The cornet became excited and gave one order after another, but no one listened to them. Everybody was watching Lukashka and waiting for instructions from him. Lukashka's manner was calm and even solemn. Urging his horse on so swiftly that the others could not keep pace with him, he gazed eagerly ahead of him, shading his eyes from the glare with his hand.

"Look, there's a horse!" he exclaimed, checking his steed and falling into line with the others.

Olenine could see no one; but the keener vision of the Cossacks had discerned two riders in the distance apparently coming straight toward the party.

"Are they Abreks?" asked Olenine.

No one deigned any response to this absurd question. No Abrek would be such a fool as to cross the river with his horse.

"Radkia seems to be beckoning to us," remarked Lukashka. "See, he is coming to meet us!"

In a few seconds it became very evident that the riders were really Cossacks belonging to the patrol.

When the two parties met the corporal walked straight up to Lukashka.

CHAPTER XLI.

"ARE they far off?" asked Lukashka.

A shot resounded about thirty paces off. The corporal smiled.

"That is Gorka firing at them," he said, indicating the enemy's position with a movement of the head.

After proceeding a few yards further, they could see Gorka reloading his rifle behind a small hillock. He was amusing himself by firing at the Abreks, who were crouching behind another hillock a short distance off.

A bullet whistled by. The cornet turned pale and lost his wits entirely. Lukashka sprung from his horse, threw the bridle to one of the Cossacks, and ran toward Gorka. Olenine followed. Two more bullets whistled by their ears. Lukashka turned to Olenine with a laugh as he hastily bent his head.

"They'll kill you, Andreitch," he exclaimed. "Go back. You've no business here!"

But Olenine was determined to see the Abreks. He had

just caught a glimpse of their caps and rifles when there came a puff of smoke, and still another bullet whistled by. The Abreks were in a marshy spot at the foot of a hillock. Olenine was amazed at the spot they had chosen. It was level, like all the rest of the steppe; but as he looked at it he said to himself that they could nowhere have found a place better suited to their purpose.

Lukashka turned suddenly and ran back to the spot where his horse was standing. Olenine followed him.

"We must get a cart with some hay on it. If we don't we shall all be killed," cried Lukashka. "Go back and get that Tartar's wagon."

The cornet and the corporal acquiesced. The wagon was brought, and the Cossacks, sheltering themselves behind it, began to push it along toward the enemy. Olenine climbed the hillock to await further developments.

The Abreks, nine in number, were kneeling in a row close together and did not fire.

Suddenly the profound silence that had prevailed was broken by a strange, lugubrious chant, similar to Uncle Jerochka's *Aï! daï! dalalaï!* The Circassians, seeing that they could not escape the Cossacks, had bound themselves together with strong leather straps to prevent themselves from taking flight, no matter how strongly they might be tempted; then, after loading their guns, they began to sing their death song.

The Cossacks drew nearer and nearer. Olenine expected every instant to hear the first discharge; but the silence was broken only by the lugubrious song of the Abreks. Then the singing suddenly ceased; a bullet struck the wagon. Fierce oaths and shrill cries resounded from the Abreks. Shot followed shot, and bullet after bullet buried itself in the hay. The Cossacks did not return the fire, though they were now only about five yards from the enemy.

Another minute passed, and then the Cossacks darted

out from behind the wagon yelling savagely. Lukashka was at their head. Olenine heard a rapid interchange of shots, a series of blood-curdling yells and frightful groans. Leaping from his horse he ran to join the Cossacks. Horror so obscured his vision that he could see nothing clearly; but he somehow divined that all was over.

Lukashka, pale as death, had seized a wounded Circassian, and was shouting:

"Don't kill him! I'm going to take him alive!"

It was the brother of the Abrek Lukashka had killed; the same one who came to ransom the body.

Lukashka held him in an iron grasp; but the Abrek suddenly wrenched himself free, and quick as lightning pulled the trigger of his pistol. Lukashka fell to the ground. The blood gushed from his breast, but he sprung up only to fall again, however, swearing in Russian and Tartar alike.

All the Abreks had now been killed except the man who had shot Lukashka. Like a wounded vulture—the blood was streaming from his right eye—with set teeth and glaring eyes he stood grasping his dagger, resolved to defend himself to the last. The cornet stole up behind him, and placing his pistol close to the Abrek's ear, fired. The man sprung up in the air with a frightful yell and fell dead.

The Cossacks separated the dead men and stripped them of their weapons. Lukashka was laid on the wagon. He was still swearing and cursing his antagonist.

"You lie! I'll strangle you with my own hands! You shan't escape me, you yellow devil!" he cried, savagely.

At last he sunk back unconscious from weakness and loss of blood.

Olenine returned home, and that evening he was told that Lukashka was lying at the point of death. A Tartar had undertaken to cure him with herbs, but even the most sanguine entertained very little hope of his recovery. The bodies of the dead Abreks had been brought to the station,

and crowds of women and children were flocking to see them.

It was twilight when Olenine reached home. He felt dazed and bewildered, but soon recollections of the previous evening — the evening spent with Marianna — began to haunt him, and he seated himself at the window. Soon he saw the girl go from the milk-room to the house. The mother was in the vineyard, her father at the government house. Olenine could wait no longer; he felt that he must see the young girl.

When she saw him come in, she turned her back on him. Olenine thought it was from modesty.

"May I come on, Marianna?" he asked.

She hastily turned and confronted him. There were tears in her eyes; her face was beautiful in its grief; but the look she gave the young man was full of haughty scorn.

"I came, Marianna—I came—" he stammered.

"Go away, I tell you! Go away!"

The expression of her face did not change; but tears were flowing in torrents from her eyes.

"What is the matter? Why are you weeping?"

"Why!" she exclaimed, in a harsh, hard voice. "They are slaying Cossacks; and you ask me why I weep?"

"Is Lukashka—"

"Go away, I tell you. What do you want here?"

"Marianna!"

"Go; you will never obtain anything from me!"

"Marianna, Marianna, do not say that!"

"Get out of my sight, cold-blooded wretch that you are!" cried the girl, stamping her foot angrily, and then springing toward him with a threatening gesture.

There was so much anger, contempt, and loathing in her face that Olenine saw he had, indeed, nothing to hope for; and without uttering a word in reply, he fled from the house as if pursued by the furies.

CHAPTER XLII.

On reaching home he threw himself on the bed, where he remained for two hours as silent and motionless as if stunned; then he went to the commander of the detachment and requested permission to return to headquarters. After effecting a settlement with his landlord through Vania, he left for the fortress where his regiment was stationed without taking leave of any one. Uncle Jerochka, who dropped in at all hours of the day and night, was the only person to bid him God-speed.

They took several glasses of wine together. A three-horse post-wagon was standing at the door, as at the time of his departure from Moscow; but Olenine made no attempt to analyze his feelings, as he had done on that occasion. He no longer dreamed of a new life. He loved Marianna more than ever, and knew that she would never return his love.

"Good-bye, good-bye, father," said Uncle Jerochka. "When you go on a campaign be sensible and heed the advice of an old man. When you come face to face with the enemy don't stay in the ranks. As soon as you fellows get frightened you all huddle together, and that is dangerous, because they always aim at a crowd. As for me, I always kept off by myself as much as possible, and that is why I've never been wounded."

"How about the ball in your back?" inquired Vania, who was putting the room in order.

"Oh, that was some deviltry of the Cossacks."

"The Cossacks?" repeated Olenine.

"Yes; they were all drunk, and Vanka Sitkne shot me in the back just for fun."

"What a shame!" remarked Olenine. "Will you be ready soon, Vania?"

"Why are you in such a hurry? Let me finish my story. The bullet didn't touch the bone, but it remained in the flesh. 'You've killed me, brother. You'll have to pay me well for this. You owe me at least a half gallon of brandy,' I said to him."

"Did it hurt you much?" asked Olenine, who was only half listening.

"Let me finish my story. He gave me the wine, and we all drank—the blood was still flowing—the floor was covered with it. After we finished the brandy, old Bourdak said: 'The fellow's going to die. Give us another gallon or I'll hand you over to the authorities.' Well, he gave us the wine, and we drank until broad daylight. I went to sleep on the stove, and the next morning I couldn't move hand or foot."

"Did it injure you seriously?" repeated Olenine, thinking it possible that he might receive an answer to his question this time.

"Do you suppose I minded a trifle like that. No; but my limbs were stiff, and I couldn't walk for awhile."

"You lived through it, though," said Olenine, who could not muster up courage to smile, his heart was so heavy.

"Oh, yes, I was soon all right again; but the bullet is still there. Feel it."

And the old man unbuttoned his shirt and bared his broad shoulders where the bullet was plainly visible near the backbone.

"See how it moves about," said the old hunter, amusing himself with the ball as with a toy.

"Will Lukashka live?" asked Olenine.

"God knows! There's no doctor here, but they've sent for one."

"To Groznoia?"

"Oh, no, father. If I were the czar, I'd have hung all your Russian doctors long ago. They don't know how to

do anything but cut and hack. They cut off Balaschew's leg and crippled him. That shows what fools they are. What is Balaschew good for now, I'd like to know? No, father, they've gone up in the mountains to get a real doctor. A friend of mine was wounded in the breast once, and the Russian doctors gave him up, but Saib cured him in a little while. The people who live in the mountains know all about herbs."

"Nonsense! they're nothing but a set of ignorant quacks. I'm going to send the surgeon that belongs to our regiment."

"Quacks!" retorted the old hunter, highly incensed. "And you'll send a surgeon? Nonsense! If your physicians had any sense our Cossacks would go to you to be cured; but even your own officers send to the mountains for our doctors. You're nothing but frauds, all of you."

Olenine made no reply, for he too was of the opinion that everything in the world he had recently left, and to which he was about to return, was a hollow mockery.

"Have you seen Lukashka? How is he?" he inquired.

"He lies like a dead man, and neither eats nor drinks, though he takes a little brandy when they pour it down his throat. It makes me feel really sad to look at him, for he was a brave fellow. I was at death's door once myself. The old women were howling around me; my head seemed to be on fire, and they had already laid me under the holy images. I lay there perfectly motionless, and it seemed to me that hundreds of little drummer boys were beating the *reveille* upon the stove. I begged them to stop, but they only beat the louder." Here the old man laughed as if he thought it a capital joke. "Pretty soon the women brought a priest to see me. He was a scapegrace, who made love to the women, gorged himself with good things, and played the *balalaïka*. I confessed to him. 'I have sinned, father,' said I. Then he began to preach to me on the sin of playing the *balalaïka*. 'Give me the accursed

instrument so I can destroy it,' said he. 'I haven't any,' I replied, for I had hidden it in one of the out-buildings, knowing they would not be likely to find it there. Well, at last they concluded to let me alone, and I soon recovered and began to play the guitar again. But what was I talking about? Oh, yes, I remember now. Take my advice and don't remain in the ranks. They will kill you if you do; and I should be very sorry to hear it. You are a good drinker, and I like a good drinker. You Russians are all fond of climbing every little hill you come to. There was a young Russian here who always ran and climbed a hill as soon as he saw it. One day he climbed one and an Abrek saw him and killed him. Oh, those Abreks are cunning fellows, and shoot even better than I do! It amazes me when I look at your soldiers. What fools they are! They all keep close together and wear red collars, just as if they wanted to be killed. One falls; they carry him off the field, and another man takes his place. How stupid! Why doesn't each man go off by himself? It would be much more sensible. Do as I say, and then the enemy won't hurt you."

"Thank you, uncle," said Olenine, rising and moving toward the door. "We shall meet again some day, God willing."

The old Cossack remained seated on the floor.

"Is this any way to part, simpleton?" he growled. We've kept company for a whole year; and you think a cool good-bye is all that is necessary. You have no idea how fond I am of you, and how much I pity you. You always seem to be so sad and lonely! I can't sleep at night for thinking of you. How true are the words of the song:

"It is hard, my brother, to dwell in a foreign land!"

"Farewell, then," said Olenine.

The old man rose and held out his hand. Olenine shook it cordially.

"No, give me your face," said the old hunter; and taking Olenine's face between his two brawny hands, he kissed him three times, and then burst into tears. "I love you; good-bye," he faltered, with great apparent emotion.

Olenine seated himself in the wagon.

"What! can it be that you're going off without giving me anything to remember you by?" cried the old man. "I think you might give me one of your rifles, at least; you have two," he added, with another burst of tears.

Olenine picked up one of his rifles and handed it to him.

"You've given him enough and more than enough already," growled Vania. "There's no such thing as satisfying the old cormorant."

"Hold your tongue, you miser!" exclaimed Uncle Jerochka, laughing.

As he spoke, Marianna stepped out on the porch, cast an indifferent glance at the departing travelers, then with a careless nod turned and went back into the house again.

"*La fille!*" exclaimed Vania, with a meaning wink.

"Go on!" cried Olenine, angrily.

"Good-bye, father, good-bye. I shall often think of you!" cried Uncle Jerochka.

After going a short distance Olenine turned and looked behind him. Uncle Jerochka and Marianna were engaged in earnest conversation, evidently about their own affairs, for neither of them vouchsafed him a parting glance.

THE END.

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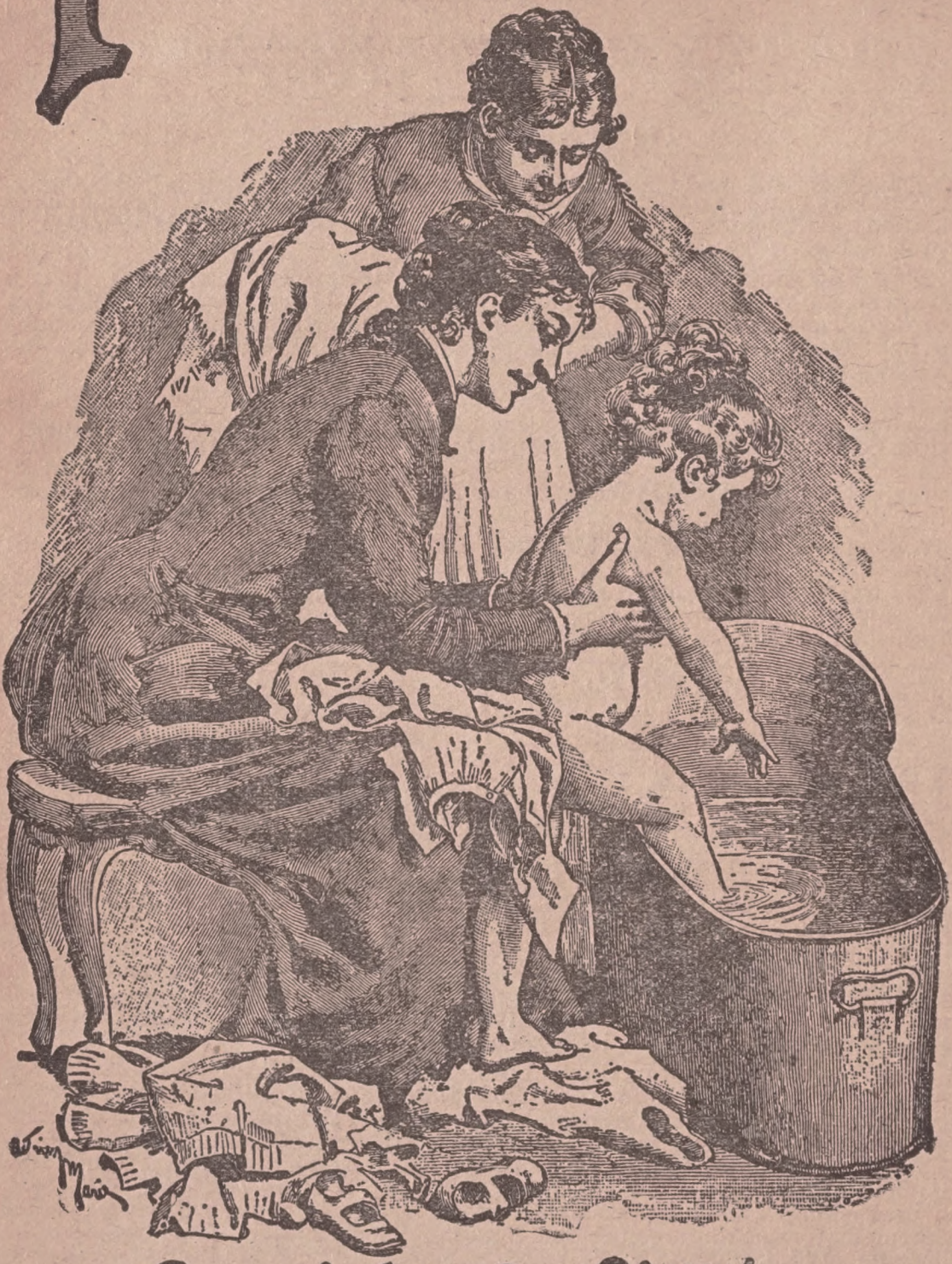

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